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STRIKING SCENES:
THEO-ETHICAL DIMENSIONS OF FILM

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LIST OF ALTERNATIVE SPELLING

Humyn, Humynity: Alternative spelling for human, humanity

Persyn: Alternative spelling for person

Womiin: Alternative spelling for women

Womyn: Alternative spelling for woman

INTRODUCTION

This project began two years ago as I entered my final semester of college and enrolled in a course named "Individualism in American Film."¹ A sociology/anthropology course, it was designed to help us delve into how films promote and condemn individualism and community. As I became more intrigued and deeply involved, I began to think about the ways in which religion, and more specifically Jesus, was and is portrayed in film. As a result, I incorporated my study of religion with the course and completed a paper entitled "The Reinforcement of the Establishment Jesus through Film." In it I analyzed traditional and liberationist views of Jesus and the connection of these theological and ethical areas to the films "Jesus Christ Superstar," "Jesus of Nazareth," and "The Last Temptation of Christ." At the time I had not thought of extending this type of work into my Master's program, but as I believe theo-ethical critique to be an essential component to the analysis of popular culture, here we are. I will never again be able to see a film without looking for certain clues of learning and although sad to some, discerning between being oppressed by or empowered through a film does not mean all of the fun of film is taken away. Rather, it enhances the depth of understanding and increases our ability to articulate what we either see or don't see.

I am not a formal film student or critic nor have I ever worked within the film industry. I am however, a theo-ethicist who believes that film,

as a part of popular culture, can and should be analyzed, dissected and critiqued within the context of theology and ethics. Film is a major medium of communication and translation in popular culture and is a primary vehicle through which values are reflected, developed and disseminated in this society. Although considered pieced together frames of entertainment, highly developed techniques and film effects teach. Film has the power to shape our thinking, our attitudes and our actions. Therefore, it is imperative to uncover the ways in which our socialization is reflected in film and in turn, the ways in which these reflections are perpetuated. I am not suggesting that film is the crux of what makes or breaks a society, but in this country where the industry is so large, I believe that film plays a bigger role in how we live than we often give it credit. I do not have all the answers, but I, like most, have watched, listened, laughed, cried, been angered and been impressed by film. I now realize why my parents would not allow me to see "Jaws" or any of the many "slasher" films, but did not raise an eyebrow when I ventured into theatres playing "Reds" and "Sophie's Choice" as an eighth and ninth grader. These films, although terrifying in their particular way, taught me about the horrors and effects of war, not about its justification and the glory of victory through the grace of god.

Too often violence is glorified; racism, sexism and ethnocentrism are justified; and heterosexism and classism are considered non-issues. This seems particularly true for the socio-political context in which the films I have chosen are situated. This context is the Reagan-Bush, Bush-Quayle era and the legacy left where homelessness, unemployment, AIDS, the threat of womiin's choice and affirmative action, the denial of gay and lesbian

rights and the constant invasion of those inside and outside this country are perpetuated by those who run our "democratic" government. This list of atrocities is by no means complete and as all atrocities are not yet known, this work is meant to be a starting point. It is designed to spur me and others on to new ideas in the hope that we can begin to think more critically about what we consider pure entertainment.

The film industry of America offers a plethora of films at any given time be they drama, comedy, action/adventure or documentary and as they are put on the screen, reviews appear in newspapers, magazines and on television. Theoretical approaches such as semiological, marxist, feminist and structuralist² are also utilized to analyze films more deeply from particular perspectives. These various avenues of review and critique help guide the viewer of films either through decisions regarding whether or not to see a film or through uncovering specific messages and effects that may be present in a film.

The primary purpose of this project is to draw on some of these different disciplines in order to analyze and critique two particular films within the context of theology and ethics. The films I have chosen have explicit ethical themes and dimensions and while overt religious themes are not present, theological analysis is necessary. Ethical and theological values are present in films whether or not explicit in theme. The fact that we do not always realize this as viewers makes the theo-ethical values more effective and effecting as we are more vulnerable to what is unexpected. It is absolutely necessary to delve into how our theo-ethical experiences and those of the creators and directors of films shape how and what we see.

Logically then, it is critical to unmask the ways in which these films either challenge or perpetuate our experiences and the experiences of those who define what is right, good and true in these United States. This reality can be uncovered in every medium of communication utilized in this country, but nowhere else is it so readily available as in the images we see in film and on Television. I focus on film because Television is still considered, for the most part, informative, while mainstream fictionalized film is still considered an escape from the "reality" we see on T.V. and in the world.

I have not included documentaries, animation, short or underground films in this study because the number of viewers is not as large. Through this work I am trying to discern how mainstream, advertised film effects and/or perpetuates and/or contributes to our socialization as members of this society. Some of what is included may seem obvious to many, but I still believe that pointing out the obvious first is the best way to get to what may not be readily apparent.

To begin delving into this critique and analysis of film it is necessary to set out several points. First, the theories in this work are implicit. I have not developed this project within the parameters of one or two specific theories and although there is a specific language in theo-ethics, I am attempting to draw on many sources, ideas and languages to get to the center of theo-ethical analysis while also trying to create a work that is as accessible as possible. Second, the specific theo-ethical components of this project involve uncovering notions of the divine, ideas of sin and grace and an engaging in analysis of racism, sexism, heterosexism, classism and ethnocentrism.³ In terms of these particular theo-ethical

pieces, I will look at how these films challenge and/or perpetuate religious and socio-political oppression. It is important to note here that my analysis is still developing in many of the areas above. My privilege and socially given power as a white, heterosexual, middle class, North American, christian womyn has determined much of how I see and the attitudes I have. Through contact with liberationist thought and analysis however, I have begun to make headway into sorting out the components and results of the socialization we experience as members of North American society.

Finally, the utilization of signifier interpretation will help uncover the theo-ethical aspects of each film. Signifiers are an aspect of semiotic theory in which sign systems are analyzed and interpreted. Within this project the signifiers deal specifically with the systems of symbols or "signs" within film. They are therefore, devices used to create suggestions of meaning in order to imply particular ways of seeing, interpreting and believing what we watch on the screen. They are, more concretely, filming strategies that influence our impressions and attitudes. Signifiers shape how we see people, images and places in films and as they are not always as blatant as might be expected, they influence our attitudes and actions within the larger society. They generally, but not always as simply, come to the audience in the form of camera angles which set up the power dynamics in a film through looking up at the powerful, down at the powerless, straight on at the equal, etc.; images and symbols which provide meaning for what is happening to or among the characters; first screen image which opens the framing of what will be seen; and last screen image which closes the framing of what has been seen.

Signifiers are chosen for a reason. Whether it is because a director likes the way something looks through the camera or because a specific known message is to be conveyed, they are chosen and the attitudes of the screenwriter, cinematographer and/or director will come through the camera and on to the screen whether or not explicitly intended. Signifiers and the power they hold to shape what is seen and how it is seen, comprise a major portion of each film that is produced. Some films use them to primarily perpetuate dominant culture themes while others use them to challenge those themes, but most seem to find some sort of balance and while falling to one side of the fence or the other, manage to both challenge and perpetuate. Directors, screenwriters and cinematographers, like all of us, are not capable of total objectivity and therefore the subjectivity of those who control what appears on the screen should be foremost in our minds. We cannot forget that those who are behind the camera are also influenced by their socialization and that this will come through the camera and on to the screen.

The first of the two films I will focus on is "Thelma and Louise." Considered one of the most controversial films in the last five years, "Thelma and Louise" is a fast becoming a feminist classic. I will analyze and critique this film in order to uncover ways in which it both challenges and perpetuates oppressive societal structures. "Do The Right Thing" is the second film I will analyze within this project. Like "Thelma and Louise," it challenges and perpetuates dominant socio-political structures, but in a different context. These two films look very different, serve different purposes, and challenge oppressive structures in distinctive ways. They both present new ways of looking at an old problem, while they also uphold

other prevalent societal structures. Within the two chapters dealing with these films, the particular socio-political context in which these films were released will be set out to make sense of why these films were and are considered so dangerously radical. Following this, interpretation and analysis of the signifiers in the two films will provide some of the critical components necessary to careful film viewing and will move us into the theo-ethical critique of each film. With respect to the theological and ethical critique, I will move through the above mentioned components including notions of the divine, of sin, of grace as well as analysis of racism, sexism, heterosexism, classism and ethnocentrism.

In the third chapter I will discuss ways in which the overall concepts and controversy in and surrounding these two films are similar and ways in which they are different. This will include how these films can critique each other and ways in which the violence in both can be viewed as opposed to how it is viewed by many critics and definers of what is good and right. Finally, in the conclusion I will provide challenges, suggestions, and possibilities for the directions in which film can go and ways in which directors and screenwriters can challenge their own assumptions and begin new thinking and filmmaking. I will include challenges to the church and to the educational system as they play a large role in the socialization of how and what we see on the screen and I will also challenge us, as the viewers of film, in the hopes that we will pass the word.

With both of the films included in this project, it is important to note that they are considered controversial for a reason: they are dangerous to the powers that be. We do, as a societal whole, rely on films to a degree

to supplement what we know about the real world and as "Thelma and Louise" and "Do The Right Thing" show us certain realities they are, of course, hazardous to the system. From Thelma and Louise blowing up a truck to Love Daddy describing the heat that has surrounded a racially mixed neighborhood, the powers that be became nervous, tried to deny the message of these films and suggested that they were not worth the time. Many of us however, know of the importance of films such as these, believe that their relevance can no longer be denied and ask for more. We know what is said and what will be said, but with more knowledge and more talk, we can and will be more prepared.

Lastly, in regard to these films and my analysis of them it is important to note that my interpretations are by no means meant to be absolute. The suggestions for interpretation set out are however meant to provide some groundwork for dissecting and linking what we see on the screen to how we are as theo-ethical agents.

NOTES

¹ Dr. Matt Maher, Sociology/Anthropology 346: "Individualism in American Film." Denison University: Granville, OH., 1990.

² Semiological film theory is concerned with sign systems in film which are the set of rules and codes which are socially, culturally, economically and historically based and which even when seeming to be obvious or simple are really complex. For more in-depth explanation see Tim Bywater and Thomas Sobchack, Introduction to Film Criticism (New York: Longman, Inc., 1989).

Marxist film theory is concerned with uncovering systems in filmmaking which are either built on and/or perpetuate profit structures and materialism. Marxist theorist focus particularly on the money making, for profit film industry and the promotion of materialism and ruling class ideals within film. For more in-depth explanation and example see Tim Bywater and Thomas Sobchack, Introduction to Film Criticism (New York: Longman, Inc., 1989).

Feminist film theory is concerned with analyzing the sexist overtones and undertones of film that comes through in narrative, action, camera use, etc. For example of use see Teresa de Lauretis, Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, and Cinema (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).

Structuralist film theory is the hardest to pin down but is very basically concerned with the structures or basic patterns of society in order to get to the heart of reasons for what organizes human activities. This theory's founder is considered to be Claude Levi-Strauss and has been applied to many aspects of cultural behavior and constructions. For more in-depth explanation see Peter Wollen, Signs and Meanings in the Cinema (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972).

³ I am concerned, in this work, with how the tradition plays a role in the attitudes people will walk away with when seeing films such as these, but am more concerned with providing liberationist perspectives and interpretations pertaining to the connections between these issues and the films discussed. Definitions of these terms are included in the Glossary of Theo-Ethical terms.

CHAPTER I

DIFFICULT CHOICES - HARD REALITIES: "THELMA AND LOUISE"

They always put their hands
 on the women first
 they do this for a living
 they do it to make a point
 cutting away the heart
 always leaves a hole
 big enough for bullets
 to crawl through

they strike
 the gentle angry women
 first
 and when they do
 they do not know
 they are touching rock

- Nicky Finney

"South Africa: When a Woman is a Rock"¹

"Thelma and Louise," is a mythically real² film upon which stories are told and libraries built. Not simply a female buddy movie or a lecture in male-bashing, "Thelma and Louise" is an empowering testament to the violence of womiin's lives. It does not speak to or for all womiin nor does it portray the everyman, but the fact that many womiin resonated with it and many men became nervous speaks to its effectiveness.

To set a context for this film and its release to American audiences, I go back to the Spring of 1991. The Gulf War or "Desert Storm" had just "ended." The heroics of the military, who against many odds, victoriously battled and battered a country into submission, were applauded. Presidential candidates announced their intentions and with ears wide open, we listened for what these men would say about child-care, African-American civil rights, protection for battered womiin and children, abortion, Gay and Lesbian civil rights, the economy, nuclear arms, Womiin's civil rights and gun control.

We waited, patiently, to hear of the Episcopal Church's decision at the 1991 General convention as to whether or not openly Gay and Lesbian people would be ordained only to see the hierarchy table the decision - again. We watched as the trial of Anita Hill, the confirmation of Clarence Thomas to the Supreme Court, the acquittal of Willy Smith on charges of rape and, of course, the President's State of the Union Address took place - all in one year.

In the middle of these events "Thelma and Louise" was released. After our "just war," womiin on the screen were condemned for using guns, a fast car, expert driving skills and a new found power to take control of their own lives. While some of the presidential candidates were coming out of their offices and into the streets of America, "Thelma and Louise" was being considered unnecessary unreality. As we poured into the theatres, searching for empowerment through entertainment, the hierarchy of the Episcopal Church decided it wasn't the right time to say "Yes" to ordaining Gays and Lesbians. And as we left the theatres, waiting for "Thelma and Louise" to be released on video, we watched Anita Hill forced to recall and recount the injustice of sexual harassment in the fear that Clarence Thomas, her harasser, would be confirmed for an appointment to the supreme court. He was as Senators, who had been publicly amused by their own violence against womiin, said "Yea." We read the condemnations of "Thelma and Louise," spoke aloud that rape is violence, stood up for self-defense and then watched the daily updates on the progress of Willy Smith's defense. We shuddered and sat, with jaws on the floor, while Willy Smith was acquitted of rape charges. We saw his accuser, Patricia Bowman, speak out as the churning wheels of justice provided background noise. And we watched as the President of these United States

received ovation after ovation in his State of the Union Address as references to Desert Storm were repeated again and again. We heard him imply that the buck does not stop with him, that any problems we experience are in no way his doing, that we should elect him again. We yelled at the T.V. and laughed at the ridiculous strings of words because truth is not commonly practiced in hallowed halls. This is the context for "Thelma and Louise." This is the reality we live with each day. This is why the content of screen pictures is so important for our well-being as we make our messages clearer and send them farther.

"Thelma and Louise," has been called many names by both male and female critics. The most often heard description is one of male-bashing where two womiin (in the formula of a male buddy film) go on a violent, "destroying everything in sight" rampage. But while these reactions are given, one all important element is forgotten, the context. The reasons behind Thelma and Louise fighting back stem from the physical and mental abuse from a husband who treats his wife like a child, to a boyfriend who cannot commit, to an implied history of violence against Louise, to a rapist whose violent actions and misogynistic attitudes create a context in which these two womiin know that justice will not be served them if they take their lives through the "normal" American justice system. Critics who fail to see this reality or the horrid wrongs of this reality are the very ones who have decided that this film is not worthy of the respected recognition that misogynistic and heterosexist films such as "Silence of the Lambs" receive.

In the "Time Magazine" featuring Geena Davis and Susan Sarandon on the

cover, Richard Schickel reports,

It is 'the first movie I've ever seen which told the downright truth,' says Mary Lucey, a lesbian activist in Los Angeles.

It is a 'paean to transformative violence . . . an explicit fascist theme,' writes social commentator John Leo, . . .

It is, according to Cathy Bell, a Houston environmental communications specialist who was once married to 'a redneck control freak' and found the courage to dump him after a liberating weekend trip with a girlfriend, 'like seeing my life played before my eyes.'

'It justifies armed robbery, manslaughter and chronic drunken driving as exercises in consciousness raising,' charges "New York Daily News" columnist Richard Johnson, who also finds it 'degrading to men, with pathetic stereotypes of testosterone-crazed₃ behavior' and half - seriously proposes a ban on it.

Did those so strongly opposed forget? Did they show up late for the screening? Do they not see fascist themes and the degradation of womiin in other films they review? Do they speak out when they are found? cursory explanations and critiques do not allow for or create the depth of understanding that is necessary for all film and when dealing with a film such as "Thelma and Louise," avoiding or not getting to the heart of the matter is a dangerous tool that sets the viewer in a mode of questioning a film's validity and not looking for its parallel reality to the society in which we live. In fact, without much dialogue surrounding films, audiences go home without realizing what positive or negative messages have been received. Without much dialogue, blanket statements from every inch of the political spectrum only leave viewers confused and as a result, the most "popular" answer receives the most votes. Clarence Page however, in his article "White Men Dislike 'Thelma and Louise,'" gives a supportive, albeit unpopular review as he writes,

If Thelma and Louise lack the gentility of better-educated women, it is because theirs is a working class version of liberation and empowerment, not a college research project. . . .

. . . As fateful events happen, they find themselves becoming fugitives from the law in events driven by a world of rapacious (and raping) men. . . .

. . . It is not everywoman's life. It is a worst case scenario, close enough to the lives of many real women to give it a resonance that transcends its cartoonists script. . . .

. . . I am most amused to see white men overreacting to this film's unflattering portrayal of white men the same way other social critics overreacted to the portrayal of black men in 'The Color Purple.' Some of us can't bear to see our worst sides portrayed on the screen without getting our wid-dow feel-wings hurt.⁴

As the theo-ethical dimensions of "Thelma and Louise" are uncovered through signifiers and religio-political issues, a new depth of understanding will be reached whereby liberationist work in film can grow and wid-dow hurt feel-wings can be analyzed, not defended.

The dimensions of this film are so layered in complexity that to separate its elements into categories, does not do justice to the film. The intertwining of the dialogue, the signifiers, relationships and messages in the film create what it is, but to get at the underlying themes and possibilities in this film is necessary in order to put it back together and see it as the whole that it is. To accomplish this, the signs or signifying elements of the film need uncovering as do the theological and ethical aspects. As the parts are uncovered and dissected, the whole will become more real.

Signifying elements of this film are found mainly in the framing of the whole, in camera angles and in various images and symbols. Through the use of these different techniques and strategies, the writer and director created a certain film content affecting our theo-ethical sensibilities and

shaping our socio-political attitudes.

The first and last shots of "Thelma and Louise" provide the framing for the story seen and are indicators as to what meaning should be derived from the film. "Thelma and Louise" both opens and closes with much the same feel as shifts in color take place. When the film first opens, the camera is focused on a plain in black and white. As the camera pans the scene, a mountain range comes into view as animated colors appear. The camera then settles and as it looks down a road towards the mountains, the colors shift again, this time to a "live" shot. This beginning sets a tone for the film not unlike the statue of liberty at the outset of "Working Girl."⁵ This opening shot shows both a road and mountain range providing viewers with a sense of a journey that has many obstacles in the way. It also, through the color shifts indicates that the story about to be seen, although considered unreality (animated) is in fact a reality (live color shot). Coupled with an ending that uses color shifts in the opposite (moving from live to animated) provides the frame for the film from which meaning can be derived. The first meaning is that with the framing of the film in this way, the writer and director intended for the viewer to see the whole film as an imaginative fantasy. The second meaning, however, is that in this framing comes a mythical story that is parallel to reality. Not necessarily obvious to viewers, this signifier shapes how the film is seen using either of these meanings in an absolute way or in a balance. This balance was found, although not explicitly stated as such by two professors interviewed for Time Magazine. As Richard Schickel states,

Barbara Bunker, who teaches psychology at the State University of New York . . . notes, 'It's a dramatic piece,

not a [literal] description of what's going on in our society. It seems to me that drama is supposed to make things larger than life so you get the point.' Agrees Regina Barreca, who teaches English at the University of Connecticut . . . 'It has got to be seen not as a cultural representation but as a fairy tale.' In₆ other words, as a dream, full of archetypes and exaggerations.

The impact of a signifier such as the one described can go unnamed without lessening its importance to the film and impact on the audience. The first shot, last shot signifier indicates what the content of the film will consist of and is a device that frames for viewers the implied meaning of the film and what it may or may not have to do with the outside world.

So too, do camera angles impact what viewers see in a film as dynamics between characters and attitudes of the makers are exposed through their use. "Thelma and Louise" interestingly has very few camera angle changes. Although used to show the power dynamics in particular scenes, the director chose, for the significant portion of the film, to look straight on at the characters, indicating two particular decisions. The first of these is that in not shaping the attitudes of the audience through showing characters as either powerful or powerless through the camera, the viewer is allowed to make this determination. The importance of this in terms of "Thelma and Louise" is in the fact that Scott (the director) is not leading the audience to believe that these women are completely powerless, thereby showing their strength and allowing the dialogue and action to be more explicitly used. The other idea indicated is that because of attitudes that some audience members may hold, the content of the film itself is enough to elicit feeling surrounding power dynamics without needing aid from camera angles.

The two particular scenes in which camera angles do change come at opposite ends of the film and indicate to the audience when and where certain

characters are either powerless or powerful. The first of these is during the rape scene at the "Silver Bullet" where the camera looks up at Harlan and down at Thelma. This may seem like a mainstream way to view a rape scene however it is not Thelma looking up at Harlan or vice versa, rather the camera is making the determination as it remains "outside" of the scene. The camera, not the characters, is therefore setting up the power dynamics for the audience. A camera angle change is also employed at the end of the film as Thelma and Louise drive off the cliff. As the car moves upward in the air, the camera, rather than moving with it, remains level as the side shot is seen, indicating that these women are in control and do have power over this action. The film action also, through freezing as the camera looks up rather than as the car (presumably) falls (which would allow a downward looking shot), shows viewers that these women do not suddenly become powerless, but remain powerful as a result of their decision.

Recurring images within "Thelma and Louise" are the most potent signs as they indicate mood shifts and expose plot intricacies. The themes present and represented by these images are mainstream for this type of film, but the images themselves are not always used in traditional ways and have more depth than might be expected.

The image of water is used in a non-traditional way as drowning rather than cleansing. As it is utilized, indications of plot shifts or previous impacting incidents occur. Water frames the rape of Thelma as Louise swerves to miss the spray from an oncoming water truck before and as rain mist is present when Thelma and Louise tear out of the "Silver Bullet" parking lot after. Also at the motel where they have stopped to figure out their next

step, Louise suggests that Thelma take a swim and while she does go to the pool she never actually gets in the water. Instead she sits by it, in a dry suit, listening to music. Rain is also connected to most of the FBI scenes where they are either setting up shop at Thelma and Darryl's house or as Hal Slocumbe tracks down and speaks to Jimmy. This sets up for the audience an effect that indicates who in the film will finally track them down. The last significant scene involving water frames the stealing of Louise's money. It begins to rain once she has picked up the money and pool and motel driveway cleaners are seen directly before Thelma and Louise discover the money missing. As water in film is typically seen as a cleansing image, the twist put on it in "Thelma and Louise" sends a further message of what these women are living and what in their lives is not what it may seem to be (i.e. the killing of Harlan as cold blooded rather than as provoked).

Images of Mack trucks are also utilized and are phallic symbols indicating the source of violence against Thelma and Louise. Although not used regularly throughout the film, they appear in key scenes as threatening obstacles. Mack trucks first appear directly after the rape of Thelma in the form of road obstacles as Thelma and Louise escape the rape/murder scene. The truck drivers honk, nearly run Thelma and Louise over and surround them as they drive on the highway which, coupled with the rain, further indicates the use of water as drowning. The other significant use of a truck as a phallic obstacle is present in several scenes as the driver of an oil truck verbally objectifies Thelma and Louise resulting in a symbolic castration of this phallic image as Thelma and Louise shoot at and blow up the truck.

This symbol is not used again as it has been literally taken out of the picture by *Thelma and Louise*.

The image and symbol of cigarettes is one of the most important within the film as it relates directly to the characters and their own needs through the use of them as controlled fire. Louise is a known smoker when the film begins as she is seen lighting up after she tells two young women that it will ruin their sex drive. This, as it comes before the past violence against her is discovered, alludes to the use of cigarettes as a control image as the internalization of her attitudes about rape surface later. Thelma does not pick up the habit until after she has been raped and both smoke in key scenes when they need control and put them out when they are either about to gain control or take control. One key scene to indicate the use of cigarettes in this manner comes when Thelma is about to rob a store in which she lights a cigarette as she is gaining control and hands it to Louise as she becomes in control. Louise smokes part of it as she waits for Thelma, but tosses it out, indicating the control she is about to gain as Thelma runs out screaming "drive, Louise, drive."⁷

These images, as signs of what is taking place within the film, frame for the audience, although not explicitly, plot changes and character development. They are indicators of what is happening to Thelma and Louise and through extension to other parts of the film, such as dialogue and character interaction, have a significant role in the theo-ethical sensibilities shaped for and gained by the audience.

Theological aspects of a film such as this, as it does not deal with explicit religious themes, are hidden, but nonetheless present. In looking

at theological themes, such as sin, grace and images of the divine, a liberationist perspective is necessary in order to get to much of the film's message. A traditional conservative standpoint only thwarts the understanding of this film and enables audience members to rely on the very attitudes reflected in some reviews.⁸ From a traditional standpoint, Thelma and Louise are sinners, the righteous are those who track them down and images of the divine are only present inasmuch as they are seen through the grace given the "justice seekers" (in the forms of FBI agents and police officers). A liberationist perspective, however, provides a standpoint that is in line with the overall message of the film and turns traditional notions and beliefs inside out. Within a theologically liberationist context then, images of the divine are very much present within both Thelma and Louise who have received grace through each other as they fight the sins of a sexist system.

Helpful here, when searching for images of the divine in "Thelma and Louise" is a passage from Touching Our Strength: The Erotic as Power and the Love of God in which Carter Heyward states,

God is our power in mutual relation. It is with and by this sacred power that we are able to nurture relationships as resources of growth as cocreative women and men. . . .

. . . We can image and know God/the Sacred as 'person' and as an 'impersonal' spirit that moves among us.⁹

Thelma and Louise in nurturing and supporting one another found the sacred within and between them. Through their friendship they lived out a power of saving whereby they were on the side of themselves, who through experiencing violence against them were the oppressed in this sexist society. Throughout the film each supported the other and essentially took over the responsibility of living when the other could not. As one had been raped

and the other charged with murder, they gave each other an ear to listen, a plan of action or a moment of laughter. These places are where the divine image rests and wherein moments of grace arise. Four scenes show this in particular ways as they move within and through different trials. The first is after Louise's money has been stolen. She is worn and Thelma literally takes her by the hand and leads her out of the motel room telling her not to worry and that everything will be all right. Soon after, Thelma robs the store, replacing some of the stolen money and restoring some of Louise's ability to go on. Unconventional - yes, but a moment of grace nonetheless as Louise is restored through Thelma's taking responsibility. Interspersed with Thelma robbing the store is one of the most beautiful scenes of the film wherein an unspoken exchange between Louise and two womiin in a nearby house takes place. As Louise waits for Thelma, she notices the two womiin and as she strains to see them, one leans forward, looks Louise in the eye and smiles. This womyn, through her knowing smile, comforts Louise and opens a realization to her that she and Thelma are not the only two womiin who have had to fight for life. This scene, coupled with Thelma taking responsibility restores Louise's sense of self and provides her the ability to continue. A moment of grace also occurs as Thelma and Louise are being chased by the FBI in which Thelma says, "I know this whole thing was my fault - I know it," to which Louise replies, "Dammit Thelma if there's one thing you should know by now, this wasn't your fault."¹⁰ In the support, comes the grace, comes the recognition that each of these womiin are in fact holders of a nurturing and forgiving spirit. The final moment of grace comes as these two womiin, through mostly unspoken words, decide their fate together.

As they face the cliff surrounded by FBI agents pointing guns at their heads they, through looking at one another, making a decision together, kissing each other and then clasping hands as they drive off the cliff, sustain a moment in which the divinity of each is recognized and a moment of grace is created.

Sin within "Thelma and Louise" lies, from a liberationist standpoint, not with these womiin, but rather with the men who perpetrate and perpetuate the acts and the structure of sexism. The sin is not in the fighting against systems of oppression as Thelma and Louise do, but in the continuing of a context that necessitates the fight that these womiin engage in. As James Cone in A Black Theology of Liberation states,

Sin . . . is a way of life in which we cease to be fully human and we make choices according to our private interests, identifying the ultimate with an alien power. It is accepting slavery as a condition of human existence by denying the freedom grounded in God's activity. Sin is an alienation from the source of humanity and the world, resulting in human oppression and misery.¹¹

Thelma and Louise are fighting that which is considered normative and are therefore becoming fully humyn. They help each other find that humynity as they struggle together, no longer accepting the oppression of their lives. These womiin are fighting the sin of rape, condescension, patronizing and objectifying language and a justice system that would not provide them justice. As they fight, Thelma and Louise are tearing down the structure of sexism, at least within their own lives, giving audiences and society a message of where the sin lies - with those who necessitated the struggle in which they are engaged. God is on their side as they are on each others side and as each are divine images within themselves and between each other.

Whether or not explicit theological topics are addressed within film they are present and as they are discovered links between them and the ethical components are made as challenges to as well as the perpetuation of societal structures are present. The ethical elements of this film are uncovered not only in the liberative "grace" found with the characters, but in the oppressive perpetuation of "sin" found within portions of the film that are not necessarily character oriented, as they come out of decisions of the writers and makers of the film. As elements of the film are discussed in the context of various "isms," it is important to remember that all film cannot portray all lives of all people at the same time that films do have a responsibility to the lives and integrity of the people they do portray.

To analyze sexism within this film is to uncover how the film itself critiques the structure of sexism. Primarily exposed through dialogue, structural sexism is critiqued as Thelma and Louise speak about their lives, speak to other characters and speak of what could happen to them if caught. Dialogue utilized by other characters expose what these womiin are up against from language to attitude and give the audience small, but not always noticeable clues, as to the depth of sexism in this society.

The first key scene in which structural sexism is exposed comes directly after Harlan rapes Thelma in which Louise is trying to figure out what to do. The dialogue that is utilized in this particular scene shows not only the advocacy that womiin should have access to within the judicial system, but the attitudes present which prevent support from happening. As they pull over in order for Louise to get sick we hear,

Thelma: Shouldn't we go to the cops, I mean I think we oughtta tell the Police.

Louise: Tell 'em what Thelma, just what do you think we should tell 'em?

Thelma: I don't know, just tell 'em what happened.

Louise: Which part?

Thelma: All of it - that he was rapin' me.

Louise: Just about a hundred god damn people saw you dancin' cheek to cheek with him all night, whose gonna believe that - we don't live in that kind of world Thelma!¹²

Even as Louise points this out, she later shows how attitudes internalized put blame on the victim. As viewers discover Louise's own past, the internalization is understood as resulting from attitudes she must have encountered during her own battle. As Thelma and Louise sit in a coffee shop trying to figure out their next step, Thelma says, "This is some vacation, I sure am havin' a good time, this is real fun," to which Louise replies, "If you weren't concerned with havin' so much fun, we wouldn't be here right now."¹³ Exposing sexism as Louise does in the first example does not, of course, mean that there are not times when the socialization and internalization of it does not surface. Both women have many realizations and transformations pertaining to their own personal power and the knowledge and challenging of sexism. They certainly show this as they speak to the truck driver about his language asking him what he would think if somebody did that to his mother. Thelma even asks if he called them "beavers" over the CB and when he says yes, she simply says, "I hate that."¹⁴ Thelma and Louise become more aware with each mile they travel and teach each other about their plight as in the scene, after the robbery, where Louise wants Thelma to call Darryl:

Louise: I want you to find out if he knows anything, if you think he does you gotta hang up the phone 'cause that means the Police are in on it and the phone is probably tapped.

Thelma: Tap the phone? What are you talkin' about?

Louise: O come on Thelma, murder one and armed robbery!

Thelma: Murder one, we can't even say it was self-defense?

Louise: Well it wasn't - we were walking away, we got away!

Thelma: Yeah, but they don't know that - it was just you and me there. I'll say he raped me and you had to shoot him, that's almost the truth.

Louise: Won't work

Thelma: Why not?

Louise: 'Cause there's no physical evidence - can't prove he did it - we can't even probably prove by now that he touched¹⁵ ya!

Thelma: God, the law is some tricky shit isn't it?

This law and its tricks become more clear as Louise speaks to Hal Slocumbe, who is the only man in the film who takes a vested interest in seeing justice done. Interestingly however, Hal continually refers to them as girls rather than womiin and one of the few times that they are referred to as womiin comes when Max (the head FBI agent) also refers to them as dangerous. Within the dialogue between Louise and Hal the judicial system and its treatment of violence against womiin is exposed and even as Hal wants to be an advocate for them there are no guarantees that justice will be served:

Hal: Hello Louise . . . How are things goin' out there?

Louise: Weird - we got some kinda snowball effect happenin' here or somethin'.

Hal: You're still with us though . . . You're still on the face of the earth.

Louise: Well, we're not in the middle of nowhere, but we can see it from here.

. . . Hal: You're gettin' in deeper every moment you're gone.

Louise: Would you believe me if I told you this whole thing was an accident?

Hal: I do believe you, that's what I want everybody to believe. Trouble is, it doesn't look like an accident and you're not here to tell me about it. I need your help here - did Harlan Pucket . . .

Louise: I don't wanna talk about it.

Hal: Wanna come on in?

Louise: Don't think so.

Hal: Then I'm sorry, we're gonna have to charge you with murder - now do you wanna come out of this alive?

Louise: You know, certain words and phrases just keep runnin' through my mind like incarceration, cavity search, death by electrocution, life imprisonment - shit like that you know what I'm sayin? So do I wanna come out alive? I don't know, I think we're gonna have to think about that.

Hal: Louise, I'll do anything, I know what's¹⁶ makin' you run, I know what happened to you in Texas.

The long, but needed conversation is, of course, what gives away their location, but even as this takes place, Thelma and Louise continue to reveal how their challenge to and realizations of sexism are freeing. It is at this point in the film where they become the most sure of each other and the bond between them as they finalize their commitment to one another. It is not that they are free from or of sexism, is it that they have taken some control of it in their lives. Before they began this trip, Louise was trying to live in the forgetting of her past and Thelma was trying to survive a husband who treated her like a child. As Louise's past comes back to her and as Thelma gets out from under her husband's rule, they both make decisions that they otherwise would not have made. One major point of contention that has surrounded this film is in Thelma's transformation as it is seen as stemming from her night with J.D. so soon after she was raped. This scene however, and the subsequent events make a much needed point about how womiin can live out their lives and how each womyn deals with the trauma of rape in a different way. Margaret Carlson's assessment of this scene is by no means wrong, but is only one way of seeing what was actually happening with Thelma. Carlson states,

The turning point in Thelma's character rests on one of the most enduring and infuriating male myths in the culture: The only thing an unhappy woman needs is good sex to make everything all right. . . . Thelma's character is transformed, more confident and buoyant than she has ever been, reducing her angst to the simplistic notion that she was stuck with a husband who was insufficiently accomplished in the bedroom.¹⁷

The myth Carlson speaks of is a real one to be sure, however a different tac can also be taken on this string of events when Thelma's context is taken seriously. It is also a myth that womiin who have been raped are incapable

of intimacy and are all the same in terms of how they deal with the horror of rape. It is not to minimize the violence of rape that I say this, but as womiin who have been raped feel a loss of control over their own bodies and their own lives, who is to say how and when the regaining of that control will take place. Thelma does regain that control and discovers new places in herself that are strong, capable and worthy after her night with J.D. As Darryl treated her like a child and seemed continually bothered by her, J.D. talks to her, listens to her and cares for and with her. No, he is not the perfect male - he steals Louise's life savings of \$6,000.00 and hits the road, but he also helps Thelma help herself as she stumbles to find her way in finding herself. This strings of events does not have to be unrealistic as womiin's lives are not the same and as womiin deal with different part of their lives differently.

By challenging the structures of sexism and by living into a gained power Thelma feels, "Awake . . . Wide awake. I don't ever remember feelin' this awake - know what I mean? Everything looks different - you feel like that too? Like you got somethin' to look forward to?"¹⁸ Thelma's transformation and Louise's realizations take them to a level of relationship and companionship that becomes ultimately bonding and bonded. Through each trial and gain of control over what they are living, Thelma and Louise are transformed and they live out those transformations through their experiences, through their friendship, through their commitment to one another and through a recognition of each others integrity. They make this final verbal commitment to one another after Louise's conversation with Hal in which Thelma says,

You're not gonna give up on me are ya?

Louise: What do ya mean?

Thelma: You're not gonna make a deal with that guy? I mean, I just wanna know.

Louise: Thelma, I'm not makin' any deals

Thelma: I mean, I'd understand if you was thinkin' about it. In a way you got somethin' to go back for - I mean Jimmy and all

Louise: Jimmy's not an option

Thelma: Cause - uh - somethin's crossed over in me and I can't go back. I mean - I just couldn't¹⁹ live.

Louise: I know, I know what ya mean.

As these scenes and the actions taken by Thelma and Louise challenge many levels of sexism so too are there challenges to a level of heterosexism in as far as these two womiin make a commitment to one another to never abandon the other. Even as heterosexual womiin, their bond to one another has become, for them, much more important than a bond to the men in their lives. The final scene of the film expresses this most deeply as Thelma and Louise decide to "keep goin'."²⁰ By kissing one another and clasping hands they are not living into the traditional roles of heterosexual womiin who are supposed to rely on men for strength and comfort. They are showing that the bond between womiin, even as heterosexual friends, is much more than a gossip session and that the support of womiin in this society is necessary for womiin as sexism is encountered daily. This film and this scene may not challenge heterosexism to a great degree, but is it not possible that one of the reasons behind the controversy surrounding this film is that these womiin do make a commitment to one another and do show that their friendship and their fight is worth getting away from ties to the men who hurt them? Is it not possible that, on one level, this film is considered so controversial because in the end, these two womiin opt for each other?

The structure of societal racism is perpetuated rather than challenged in "Thelma and Louise" and although racism is not meant to be explicitly

dealt with, the perpetuation of it within a film that challenges is problematic as it is hidden and as audiences do not look for or notice its presence. There are very few central characters within this film which makes it all the more difficult to include many experiences outside of those central to the story, however as one scene in particular is used as comic relief, racism is perpetuated rather than challenged. This scene involves the Rastafarian man who, after Thelma and Louise have locked the Police officer in the trunk of his car, comes onto the scene and proceeds to blow marijuana smoke into one of the holes that Thelma and Louise shot in the trunk for air. This is an amusing scene and does provide some relief from the intensity of the film itself, however it is problematic because once again, a societal convention of using a black man for comic relief is utilized. This scene is quite unnecessary and as there are no other people of color that are focused on in a manner that is nearly this central, the racism of it is all the more blatant. Perpetuating racism while challenging sexism only leaves these two issues disconnected and as audiences needed comic relief at this point in the film, the noticing of the racism is passed over.

Classism as it is dealt with in the film is connected to the reactions to it as "Thelma and Louise" is not considered feminist by many feminists. The first question is what type of feminism is being spoken of? Without a class analysis, the perpetuation of middle class feminism has and will continue to prevail. Thelma and Louise were using the resources available to them in their struggle to stay alive. They had \$6,000.00, a car and their wits to work with in order to get to Mexico and begin again. To say that these womiin within their context were not acting out of a feminist

consciousness is to say that there is only one type of feminism where fighting back out of one particular context is the only one that is legitimate.

"Thelma and Louise" does engage in a critique of classism as these two womiin are working class and use the resources available to them. Fighting back does not always mean using the legal system or going to a rape crisis center or a march. Again, I refer to Clarence Page when he states that "If Thelma and Louise lack the gentility of better-educated women, it is because theirs is a working-class version of liberation and empowerment, not a college research project."²¹ Some of the critics that have reviewed and critiqued the film have viewed it as non-feminist because these two womiin do not fit into the prescribed roles of feminism. In her essay, "Is This What Feminism is All About?" Margaret Carlson states,

Yet for all the pleasure the film gives women moviegoers who want to see the worst of the opposite sex get what's coming to them, it can hardly be called a woman's movie or one with a feminist sensibility. As a bulletin from the front in the battle of the sexes, 'Thelma and Louise' sends the message that little ground has been won. For these two women, feminism never happened. Thelma and Louise are so trapped that the only way for them to get away for more than two days is to go on the lam. They become free but only wildly, self-destructively so - free to drive off the ends of the earth.

They are also free to behave like - well, men. For all the talk that 'Thelma and Louise' is the first major buddy movie, it is more like a male buddy movie with two women plunked down in the starring roles.²²

"Thelma and Louise" is a feminist film. Feminists cannot afford to create more boxes from which liberation is played and a great service would be done if middle class feminists recognized that not all womiin with feminist consciousness can act out of it in the same way. There are different layers added to each womyn's experience that creates a context from which she must work and Thelma and Louise both show this through their lives and actions.

As "Thelma and Louise" does engage in challenging some of the societal structures under which we live, those who have seen it and those who have yet to see it can learn a great deal from it. It is a necessary film in the fight for liberation and as it is a part of popular culture it has the ability to reach more people and shape more ways of thinking than many other forms of communication. As it does perpetuate racism however, analysis of it is also necessary to bring all "isms" together in the consciousness of those who create and make films such as this. The importance of this film and the uncovering of all its intricacies can bring all feminists and non-feminists to a new state of understanding as long as we know what we are watching, have the ability to critique and analyze it and are willing to open up our eyes and ears to the possibilities it offers. As Clarence Page states, "Thelma and Louise may capture the sexual tensions of our times the way Spike Lee's 'Do The Right Thing' captured the racial tensions of 1989"23

NOTES

¹ Nicky Finney, "South Africa: When a Woman Is a Rock," in Catalyst, (Fall 1986) quoted in Angela Davis, Women, Culture, and Politics (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 97.

² By "mythically real" I do not mean an untruth that is claimed to be real. Rather, I am thinking along the lines of stories that help explain where we come from, where we are and where we are going. "Thelma and Louise" is a story that helps us continue and helps explain to others what is happening to us in this society.

³ Richard Schickel, "Gender Bender," Time Magazine, 24 June 1991, 52.

⁴ Clarence Page, "White Men Dislike 'Thelma and Louise,'" ***need paper name, date, section and page numbers.

⁵ Working Girl, dir. Mike Nichols, with Harrison Ford, Sigourney Weaver and Melanie Griffith, 20th Century Fox, 1988. The first image seen in this film is the Statue of Liberty and as the plot of the film unfolds, a working class womyn climbs up the corporate ladder to achieve the American Dream.

⁶ Schickel, "Gender Bender," 53-54.

⁷ Thelma and Louise, dir. Ridley Scott, with Geena Davis and Susan Sarandon, MGM/Pathé Communication Co., 1991.

⁸ See pages 13 and 14 of this chapter for examples found in Richard Schickel's article "Gender Bender."

⁹ Carter Heyward, Touching Our Strength: The Erotic as Power and the Love of God (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1989), 188-189.

¹⁰ Thelma and Louise

¹¹ James H. Cone, A Black Theology of Liberation, 2nd edition (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1986), 106.

¹² Thelma and Louise

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Margaret Carlson, "Is This What Feminism Is All About?," Time Magazine, 24 June 1991, 57.

¹⁸ Thelma and Louise

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Page, "White Men Dislike 'Thelma and Louise.'"

²² Carlson, "Is This What Feminism Is All About?"

²³ Page, "White Men Dislike 'Thelma and Louise.'"

CHAPTER II

EXPOSING STRUCTURAL INTRICACIES: "DO THE RIGHT THING"

. . . As the rhythm designed to bounce
 What counts is that the rhymes
 Designed to fill your mind
 Now that you've realized the prides arrived
 We got to pump the stuff to make us tough
 From the heart
 It's a start, a work of art
 To revolutionize make a change nothin's strange
 People, people we are the same
 No we're not the same
 Cause we don't know the game
 What we need is awareness, we can't get careless
 You say what is this?
 My beloved lets get down to business
 Mental self defensive fitness
 (Yo) bum rush the show
 You gotta go for what you know
 Make everybody see, in order to fight the powers that be
 Lemme hear you say...
 Fight the power . . .
 We've got to fight the powers that be.

-Public Enemy
 "Fight The Power"¹

Spike Lee, in his reflecting the times, made a bold statement with "Do The Right Thing." Through exploring the many layers of societal racism, "Do The Right Thing" sets out and exposes the intricacies involved in systemic oppression and has created a pathway in popular culture for dealing with structural "isms" and its effects on those who try surviving them. As Lee tackles the fighting among and within groups and exposes this as a design by the system to keep that system in place, he has delved into a classic problem that has no easy solution. His characters reflect real life situations at their core which has left audiences thinking about and questioning the racism that operates as a control agent within this society.

To put this film in a context is to go back to 1988 and 1989 where

incidents of violence against people of color were, once again, on the rise. On my own college campus, overt incidents of violence took place as they did on many college campuses that year. So too were they taking place on the streets of America as Yusef Hawken was killed in Bensonhurst while he answered a used car ad. Around the world "justifiable" violence continued in Nicaragua as the Sandinistas defended themselves against U.S. backed Contras; students in Tianenmen Square stood up for reform only to be crushed by their own government; and the U.S. military, on Christmas Eve 1989, invaded Panama to capture Manuel Noriega, destroying civilian lives in the process. Even as Nelson Mandela was released in February, 1990, apartheid (only an exaggerated and more blatant U.S. system) would live and its leaders would continue the genocide of a people native to the land in which they were being killed. And within U.S. borders, Reagan would pass on a legacy to Bush wherein civil rights gains were chiseled away in the name of "reverse discrimination" and the "reality of an American Dream."

As Spike Lee wrote "Do The Right Thing," these and many other events surrounding violence against people of color took place. As Lee directed and compiled this film, the names of the victims of police violence appeared on the screen. As the dedication to Eleanor Bumpers, Michael Griffith, Arthur Miller, Edmund Perry, Yvonne Smallwood and Michael Stewart became visible on screen, violence against Yusef Hawkins and Rodney King only lay in wait.

"Do The Right Thing" exposes the intricacies of and expresses the difficulty in fighting a system that is not always visible to the naked eye.

An opportunity to uncover the ways in which the system works was taken on by Lee and although he has been accused of much in the wake of this film and its contents, Lee responds with:

Am I advocating violence? No, but goddamn, the days of twenty-five million blacks being silent while our fellow brothers and sisters are exploited, oppressed, and murdered, have to come to an end. Racial persecution, not only in the United States, but all over the world, is not gonna go away; it seems it's getting worse (four years of Bush won't help). And if Crazy Eddie Koch gets re-elected for a fourth term as mayor of New York, what you see in 'Do The Right Thing' will be light stuff. ²
 Yep, we have a choice, Malcolm or King. I know who I'm down with.

Lee, through his insight and in his ability to weave the many levels of racism together created a film in which the political implications and message were, in themselves, strongly radical and dangerous to the powers that be. As critics proclaimed that the film was unrealistic on many fronts and unnecessary on others, they showed their fear of dealing with issues of racism and how that racism is bred and sold in these United States. Michele Wallace in Invisibility Blues sets out two critics views when she states that,

. . . no one in her right mind would want to be associated with the negative criticism that has been made of the film by people like Joe Klein at 'New York' magazine, who asks why the police aren't more sympathetically portrayed, as if every other film or TV show weren't about how wonderful white cops are, or ³
 by the 'Seven Days' writer who said the film might cause riots.

Lee's point, in making a film that deals specifically with racism, was to expose the history and violence of racism as well as to make people, such as the two critics cited above, question their immediate reactions and open their eyes to what is really happening here and around the world. "Do The Right Thing" does not cause riots, it exposes their origins and is designed to make Americans think the next time an "incident of racial violence" is reported. Is it not possible that the stereotypes fed children as they grow

cause riots; is it not possible that the example of a government that tramples "others" might be followed; is it not possible that a belief in "separate, but equal" exists to such a degree that fear of anything else keeps people in their own corners, only ready to come out fighting? As an example of a film praised, certainly much more than "Do The Right Thing," "Mississippi Burning" shows the level to which whites will accept the civil rights movement of the 60's and the continuing struggle for freedom today. As it was supposed to be a challenging film, "Mississippi Burning" was seen as a plausible portrayal of a civil rights struggle. Even though it was historically incorrect, critics and audiences could deal with it because it was "in the past," because the FBI were portrayed as the good guys, because whites were the protagonists and because Blacks were only background extras. "Do The Right Thing" may be more threatening, but that is a result of its reflecting reality, not rewriting history. As Armond White writes, "Lee's presentation of a black point of view may seem audacious to some. . . . This world is what a near-century of Hollywood filmmaking has tried to deny with its kitsch view of democracy - the illusion of social harmony achieved by drowning out dissenting views."⁴ Lee is using his art to challenge not only the popular medium of filmmaking, but is also unveiling the untruth of films and newsmedia alike. He is not allowing for the "white is right" mentality to fly when dealing with racism; instead, he is showing the interactions, levels, and intricacies of the lives of people of color in a society where there is no choice but to be courageous in this "Home of the Brave."

The theo-ethical dimensions of this film as they are uncovered show the intricacy and depth involved in the structure of racism. Lee has provided

much information in a short period of time and while all issues are not dealt with or dealt with perfectly, the levels of and layers in a system that perpetrates and perpetuates racism are set out through character interaction, dialogue and action. The dangers of blaming the victim, of not recognizing where oppression originates, and of not exposing intricacies of societal oppression comprise the overall content of this film as it points out the effects of such dangers and shows the reality based lives that characters lead on one day in the life of New York's Bed-Stuy.

The content of "Do The Right Thing" is so layered and intricate as it is dealing with many characters, issues and components of those issues at one time that all of Lee's intentions and messages can only be uncovered through some separation of the film's components. While it has one overriding message of "Fight The Power," this film takes that notion and weaves together a group of people in one place at one time that are doing double duty by dealing with daily survival issues while trying to make changes. As these people's lives and the oppression under which they live are revealed in the film, the many details of the structure of racism come to life. Lee, through his ability to put his political insight on the screen sets a context for the audience in which the content of the film teaches and shapes how the world outside of the film needs to be critiqued and analyzed. Through different signifiers, the use of specific images and theo-ethical components, an uncovering of the centers of racism is disclosed as the perpetuation of racism and its effects are explored.

Primary signifiers in this film are not far removed from those in "Thelma and Louise" as first screen image-last screen image, camera angles and images

are important to analyze within any film. Within "Do The Right Thing" the strategy for using certain signifiers is somewhat unconventional and is often more hidden than in other films which serves to guide the viewer in specific ways in the shaping of attitudes.

The first shot-last shot signifier which serves as a frame for "Do the Right Thing" is somewhat unusual as it is removed from the central action/plot of the film. As the film opens, Public Enemy's "Fight The Power" provides music for a womyn dressed in black and red, dancing defiantly in front of a New York stoop splashed with red lens lighting. This initial image (although her costume, the backlighting, and the setting changes throughout the sequence) coupled with the last screen image of quotes from Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X on their respective philosophies of non-violence, frames for the audience the violence in the film and the need to fight the powers that cause the violence. The framing of the film in this manner allows the audience to gain insight as to what will happen within the film as well as what needs to happen in the larger society. Lee is providing the information needed through the action/plot of the film and through the framing is offering a solution or solutions to the violence of racism.

Camera angles, as they are utilized, show both the intricacies of systemic racism and the balance that racism is capable of stealing from people's lives. Within this film, the intricacies of relationships between peoples of different racial/ethnic backgrounds are revealed as the camera is mostly used in a non-conventional way. The power that is given to the characters at particular times show the dynamics of the power relations involved when oppressed groups deal with each other and attempt to

gain control of the lives that they lead. Lee uses the camera to turn conventional angles on their head. Where those in positions of power-over would usually be looked up at as an indication of that power, Lee uses angles to show when persyns are empowered. Throughout the film *Radio Raheem*, who is empowered as he listens to "Fight The Power" continuously, receives upward shots as he first turns on the radio, as the water from the hydrant is deflected in order for him to walk through, as the "music battle" between him and the Hispanic man takes place, as he goes for a "slice" at Sal's, as he buys batteries in the Korean store, and as he returns to Sal's at night just before the fighting begins. The only time a downward shot is used is as he and Buggin' Out are first seen planning to go to Sal's in protest, indicating that they are feeling powerless, but are about to be empowered upon reaching Sal's. Buggin' Out also receives upward looking shots as he speaks of the boycott to Sweet Dick Willy and as it is a side shot, the camera is determining the empowerment for the audience rather than allowing a normal shot coming from Sweet Dick Willy's perspective as he is sitting down and Buggin' Out is standing up. The camera determines the disempowerment of Sal (who has more power as a white male than the characters who confront him) as he is looked down on both when Radio Raheem first enters the Pizzeria for a "slice" and as Radio returns before the fighting begins. Another use of differing camera angles comes as the camera is off its horizontal axis when looking at both Mother Sister and Da Mayor. This indicates how the lives of these two people and the survival they have been capable of (although different in outcome) has been not only difficult, but off-balancing as these two have seen decades pass with little real change occuring. For

much of the film, the camera angles are not as obvious although slight variations on the straight on shot do occur. An example of this is seen as the camera relates to the police officers and the convertible driving man as they speak to each other about the fire hydrant water being turned on the car. Another example comes through in how the camera often views Smiley as he wanders around the neighborhood selling pictures of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X at their only meeting. Lee, in his using the camera to show empowerment and disempowerment rather than power-over scenarios, is critiquing racism with the camera rather than enforcing traditional power relations within the structure of racism.

Images too, are elements of the film that are central to the understanding of the message Lee is trying to put across. The main images of "heat" and "water" are used show both oppression and the attempt to survive it. As the film opens and Love Daddy's dialogue begins he speaks of the heatwave that is surrounding New York. As the sun beats down on this neighborhood an indication of the controlling nature of white power structures is given. As the plot unfolds and relief from the "heat" is nowhere in sight, each racial/ethnic group is presented. As all are living in the same neighborhood and are trying to survive with one another, the "heat" provides evidence of a system that is capable of not only keeping the oppressed in a particular part of the city, but also of socializing them in such a way that the designs for in-fighting are successful. The heat is not remedied in any significant way as only short instances of relief (survival) from it appear in the form of water. The heat remains for all of the film and even as it gets dark, the white police officers (taking over for the symbol

of "heat") move in to break up the riot, killing Radio Raheem in the process. Water is seen in only two specific sequences in the film as the fire hydrant is opened and the neighborhood "cools off" and as Mookie takes a shower while Tina immerses her face in a sink full of ice water. These two images of heat and water set much of the tone for and explanation of the intricacies of the film as they are used to show both the oppressive nature (heat) of the system under which the people who are surviving (water) live.

Another key image and one that is most tangible is in the photograph of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X that Smiley carries with him and sells. As Smiley stutters, the picture itself speaks for him. Two paths of action are essentially offered in one photograph as this image is recurring and is used to show the necessity of fighting the power in some form (no matter which one might be chosen). Smiley is often seen walking through the background of particular action for no apparent reason, but as he appears, showing the photograph prominently, an indication of the importance of the two men pictured is given whereby their message is portrayed as vital to the life of African-Americans.

As these signifiers and images are utilized within "Do The Right Thing" they round out and give life to the message of the film. These images are indicators of what is happening not only within the film, but within the larger society and provide a framework for the theo-ethical content found as Lee exposes an intricate system of race oppression.

The theological content of this film is, as in "Thelma and Louise," implicit rather than explicit. The only point in the film where any specific

religious reference is made is when Mookie says "Hell No!" to Jehovah's Witnesses as he walks to work Saturday morning.⁵ Images of the divine and notions of grace and sin are nonetheless present, and are seen through character interactions and in the overall message of the film.

An image of the divine is found primarily in the character of Love Daddy, the "We Love Radio" DJ, whose voice is the first and last heard in dialogical form in "Do The Right Thing." Love Daddy is the only character in the film who speaks over some scenes, interrupts others, describes to those in radio land what is happening outside his window, and speaks of the heat that has surrounded the neighborhood in a "first knowledge" manner. A more traditional use of a divine image, Love Daddy is omniscient as he disseminates information; all powerful as he cries, "Time out! Ya'll take a chill - you need to cut that shit out," interrupting and stopping the listing of stereotypes by various characters (also a moment of grace); and ever present as he is heard over the airwaves all day and into the night (there is no indication that he sleeps).⁶ Other images of the divine and those that are somewhat less traditional appear in the characters of Mother Sister and Da Mayor. These two are the matriarch and patriarch of the neighborhood. They are two characters that are developed in such a way that, even though they are not central, their lives on this day are interwoven throughout the film. Mother Sister is "always watchin'" and Da Mayor's advice to "always do the right thing" shows the intention of Lee's screenplay to portray them as definitive characters.⁷ Da Mayor, even as he is ridiculed, showing a rejection of the divinity in him, saves a boy from being run over, presenting the divinity he holds and the grace he gives. Mother Sister, on the

other hand, as she cries "No, No!" as Sal's burns and the killing of Radio Raheem becomes known, fulfills the divine image of a "god" as she shows, not pity, but solidarity (a form of grace) for "her children" through emotion.⁸

As these primary images of the divine give grace so too do other characters who comfort and empower one another. As Jade brushes out Mother Sister's hair; as Mookie tells Vito to stand up to his abusive brother, Pino; and as Radio Raheem tells Mookie the story of Love and Hate found in his rings, moments of grace appear in liberationist, consciousness raising ways.

Sin, as it is exposed in this film, relates directly to the perpetuation of racism. From a liberationist standpoint, sin within this film originates with the white power structures that keep a system in place whereby different oppressed groups fight with one another. The sin of racism and the destruction that appears in its wake is the central message of this film wherein Lee exposes the classic execution of racism through which fighting among oppressed groups keeps the powers that be in place. Socialized beliefs that breed and continue stereotypes and preconceptions are designs of a system that is interested in keeping the power over those who it oppresses. Cone's definition of sin is revealing within this context as it "is a way of life in which we cease to be fully human and we make choices according to our own private interests, identifying the ultimate with an alien power."⁹ That alien power is the greed of white structures in which the perpetuation of racism is used to the advantage of the structure in place. As is witnessed within the film, the "heat" surrounding the neighborhood is that which keeps those in the neighborhood essentially immobilized in the situation under

which they live. To get to the heart of the problem would be to fight the power structures, but as each character tries to survive, the fighting of one symptom of sin occurs wherein the cycle of the sin of racism continues. Lee was not, through this film, creating a context for helpless people. He was however, pointing out the origins and capability of the violent structure of racism and was showing the damage that is done to those who are forced to live as victims of it.

Theological topics, which are not explicit within this film, become evident as they are related to the ethical issues that are either critiqued and/or perpetuated. Ethical elements of this film come through, not only in moments of grace between characters and the critique of racism, but in the perpetuation of systemic sin found in the interactions and treatments of certain characters. Even as Lee is exposing realities within this film, it is evident that what is not considered central to the message of "Fight the Power" is seen as less important and is treated with less intention.

Racism, as it is critiqued within and is central to this film, is primarily exposed through interactions among the various characters set forth. It is important to remember that when dealing with the racism in this film that the "Heat" or the white power structures are seen as the controlling agent that is essentially creating a cycle in which each group represented in this neighborhood has internalized and lives out that which has been taught by and learned through the power structures. This, as the context of the film creates a content in which Lee has set out the realities of racism asking the audience to think about what is seen and the significance it has for the society in which we live.

The most prominent scene showing the reality of socialized racism appears as blatant slurs against different racial/ethnic peoples are listed down by members of each group represented in the film. This listing of violent stereotypes is critiqued as they are spoken outright and as Love Daddy stops the litany by telling them all to "take a chill."¹⁰ This scene, as it is in the center of the film, shows how the action and interaction of each character is a product of the racist society in which they live and provides a turning point as these interactions begin to rise in temperature. Throughout the film small bits of dialogue show the dynamics of racism as it is an integral part of the daily lives that each character leads. It cannot be separated out in any easy fashion as a result of its reality and is shown in the film through Mookie's talk with Pino about his "favorite famous people;" the slow motion shot of the police officers saying "what a waste" to Sweet Dick Willy and Coconut Sid; Buggin' Out's request for African-American pictures on the wall of fame; and through the killing of Radio Raheem by a white police officer.¹¹ "Do The Right Thing" is a film specifically designed to show the realities and effects of racism and as such is wholly a critique of that structure.

Classism, as it is integrally related to racism in the film is also critiqued as the fighting among groups is not only related to racism, but also to economic realities. As the film is situated in a working class neighborhood, the economics of each person's life become central to the racism acted out or fought against. Sal and his sons come in from Bensonhurst each day to open up shop and run a business wherein money is made from the African-Americans in the community and the Koreans, through the business of a general

store, also make money through the people of Bed-Stuy. The presence of the Koreans also adds a dimension of the reality of ethnocentrism to the film as Coconut Sid derides the Koreans for coming into Bed Stuy and opening up shop. Scenes incorporating the importance of economic stability include Mookie counting his money at the outset of the film; Sal talking of a profitable business day; Jade asking Mookie when he will make enough to move out of her apartment; and Sweet Dick Willy proclaiming that he is going to "go give those Koreans some of my money."¹² As classism within this film is connected to racism, the playing out of the age old fear that one group will take away economic stability from another is evident. Sal is derided for owning a business in this community as are the Koreans as a result of believing them to be the culprits in the hardship of the economic system. What is actually taking place however, is that which is clear when dealing with the racism and connected images in the film: the system is set up in such a way as to create beliefs and stereotypes which contribute to a circular "blaming the victim" in which the system itself is never exposed as the culprit of oppression. As Donald Hogan states, in a personal testament printed in "Harper's Magazine,

I am not an idealist, nor a cynic, but merely unafraid of contradictions. I have seen men face each other when both were right, yet each was determined to kill the other, which was wrong. What each man saw was an image of the other,¹³ made by someone else. That is what we are prisoners of.

While racism, classism and ethnocentrism are critiqued within the film through images of a system that causes the realities this film sets forth, heterosexism is treated as a non-existent issue and sexism is perpetuated. As homosexuals are invisible and treated as non-existent within this film,

heterosexism is perpetuated through that invisibility and as womiin are treated as periphery objects, sexism is perpetrated and perpetuated.

The sexism perpetuated within "Do The Right Thing" comes through in a myriad of ways as different relationships are characterized and levels of participation revealed. It can be said on one level that Lee was portraying the reality of sexism within the community as the womiin are purely marginal characters with very little dialogue, but as no care is given to even mentioning the double oppression under which womiin of color live sexism is only perpetuated. This is evidenced in the film as different womyn are portryaed either through their connections to or exploitation by men.

Ella, who hangs out with Ahmad and Co., is never seen as a separate person with her own integrity. She is told to call Ahmad out of his house and then is derided for doing so; she, through the script, only provides a few "yeah's" here and there; and she is used as a closing ornament when left staring at Da Mayor after he is ridiculed as a drunk by Ahmad. The only time Ella is seen as having or at least attempting to have control over a situation takes place as the fighting in Sal's begins. As she stands on a table yelling for them to "Stop it" she remains unheard even as she is seen as trying to fulfill a caretaker role, which in this film, is not even seen as worthy of recognition (evident with Tina, Mookie's girlfriend and Hector's mother). As bell hooks points out,

The one young black woman who 'hangs' with the boys in the film is introduced in a scene where she is tricked, manipulated, and humiliated. Passive acceptance of this role seems to be the right of initiation enabling her to be in the group. When the violence erupts, we suddenly see her in a traditionally sexist-defined female role, hovering on a corner hysterically, crying and in a later scene pleading with the 'men' to stop.¹⁴

Jade, Mookie's sister, is seen as a strong character at first as she tells her brother to get to work, take care of his responsibilities and to get his life together. She, as his older sister, is still providing care for her adult brother as if this is her prime responsibility in life. She may be central to Mookie's life as he needs her for daily survival, but even as this is true, she is treated in a marginal and patronizing way. As she speaks to Buggin' Out about being "down for somethin' positive in the community" she is not heard and is told that she is loved anyway (even though her opinion and ideas don't really count).¹⁵ Mookie treats her as if a child when he takes her by the arm, drags her out of Sal's and is told that she is not allowed to come to the pizzeria any more as if she needs a lesson in how to conduct herself and where or where not to go.

The character of Tina, Mookie's girlfriend, provides the most glaring example of sexism within the film as Mookie treats her as though she is in the way of his daily schedule until he decides to see her as a sex object. The blase manner in which he treats Tina's integrity and personhood becomes glaringly evident as Hector, Tina's son, is revealed as Mookie's son. Even as Tina speaks to Mookie at the top of her vocal capacity, Mookie ignores her and views her as an object that he should be able to use when he wants and how he wants. As bell hooks in Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics states, "Tina, Mookie's woman friend, appears tough when the film begins, but when it ends she is trapped into that old movie frame where the woman is 'seduced and abandoned,' gaslighted again and again."¹⁶

Despite the perpetuation of some "isms" within "Do The Right Thing," it is one of the most important films made within the past five years.

As it deals with the intricate realities of racism and exposes the effects of that racism, it also makes a statement about how this reality must change. Although it does perpetuate both heterosexism and sexism, the exposure given to the levels of racist oppression bring this problem to the forefront in a medium that reaches countless numbers at one time. "Do The Right Thing," as a film that put politics at the forefront, reminded those that had forgotten that the civil right struggle continues and that the movement must carry on. As the struggle to end racist oppression continues, choices must be made as is evidenced in Lee's film end where Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcom X are quoted as saying,

Violence as a way of achieving racial justice is both impractical and immoral. It is impractical because it is a descending spiral ending in destruction for all. The old law an eye for an eye leaves everybody blind. It is immoral because it seeks to humiliate the opponent rather than win his understanding; it seeks to annihilate rather than convert. Violence is immoral because it thrives on hatred rather than love. It destroys community and makes brotherhood impossible. It leaves society in monologue rather than dialogue. Violence ends by defeating itself, it creates bitterness in the survivors and brutality in the destroyers.

-Martin Luther King, Jr.¹⁷

I think there are plenty of good people in America, but there are also plenty of bad people in America and the bad ones are the ones who seem to have all the power and be in these positions to block things you and I need. Because this is the situation you and I have to preserve the right to do what is necessary to bring an end to that situation, and it doesn't mean that I advocate violence, but at the same time I am not against using violence in self-defense. I don't even call it violence when it's self-defense, I call it intelligence.

-Malcolm X¹⁸

As Lee, through his film, exposes racism through popular culture and places the dynamics of how racism operates on the screen he, in putting the

message out, is not ". . . going to play Jesus Christ and get up there and say, 'Do this, do that, that's the right thing,' . . . I just want people to think."¹⁹

NOTES

¹ Public Enemy, Fear Of A Black Planet: The Counterattack on World Supremacy, DefJam Recordings, Columbia Records CT45423, 1990.

² Spike Lee (with Lisa Jones), Do The Right Thing: A Spike Lee Joint. Fireside Books: Simon & Schuster, (1989) quoted in Michele Wallace Invisiblity Blues: From Pop to Theory, (London: Verso, 1990), 107.

³ Michele Wallace, Invisiblity Blues: From Pop To Theory (London: Verso, 1990), 108.

⁴ Armond White, "Scene on the Street," Mother Jones Magazine, September 1989, 46.

⁵ Do The Right Thing, dir. Spike Lee, with Spike Lee, Bill Nunn, Ossie Davis and Ruby Dee, Forty Acres and a Mule Production, 1989.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ James H. Cone, A Black Theology of Liberation, 2nd edition (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1986), 106.

¹⁰ Do The Right Thing

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Donald Hogan, "A personal testament by," in Harper's Magazine, (January 1972) quoted in Alice Walker, Revolutionary Petunias & Other Poems (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973), 37.

¹⁴ bell hooks, Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics (Boston: South End Press, 1990), 182-183

¹⁵ Do The Right Thing

¹⁶ hooks, Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics.

¹⁷ Martin Luther King, Jr. quoted in Do The Right Thing

¹⁸ Ibid, Malcolm X quoted in.

¹⁹ Peggy Orenstein, "Spike's Riot," Mother Jones Magazine, September 1989, 46.

CHAPTER III

EXTERNAL ATTITUDES - INTERNAL THEMES: CONNECTIONS IN RADICAL FILM

Connections between the two films discussed in previous chapters may seem tenuous as the initial nature, statement, context and content of each is observed. The intention of uncovering links in the themes and character context is to reveal how films that challenge, deal with overall realities and similar underlying results of those realities. The repetitive nature of radical films is necessary to show the connections between and similarities in the lives of all oppressed peoples. This repetition sets out, although not always explicitly, the necessity of solidarity within and among communities of resistance.

The most readily apparent connection is revealed in the reactions to these films. Praised in some circles and by some critics, both "Thelma and Louise" and "Do The Right Thing" were also considered dangerous both inside and outside the community contexts they portray. An effective tool of those who oppose films such as these, name calling can, in effect, strike fear in and render silent those who enjoyed, resonated with or found strength in such films that challenge.

For instance, "Thelma and Louise" when charged with the promotion of male-bashing and unjustifiable violence, left women questioning feelings surrounding the film and caused many who wanted to identify with the film in fear of being labeled angry and un-womanly. Many also spoke out however, telling the truth of our lives in connection with these characters' lives. Would Anita Hill and Patricia Bowman have spoken out? Maybe, maybe not! Would the critics who opposed the film have changed their minds about it if the release date had been after these two trials about violence against

womiin? Maybe, maybe not! The point is, for womiin who experience and/or fear violence at the hands of men, Thelma and Louise's strength should enable progress, not silence.

Critically oppositional reviews to "Do The Right Thing" reap effects similar to "Thelma and Louise" as it is charged with creating possibilities for race riots within and among racially and ethnically diverse neighborhoods.¹ The fact that Spike Lee left the audience with two options for "Fighting the Power" by quoting both Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X, left both critics and dictators of societal norms with only one option - to call it inflammatory. Liberationists know that this argument has been used by White Americans to create insulation from harm. It has been, for the most part, acceptable to follow Martin Luther King, Jr., but only because Malcolm X's philosophy of self-defense was the only other prominent option. By implying that "Do The Right Thing" is inflammatory and indecisive, the possibilities for rendering racial and ethnic communities divided and paralyzed is awesome. Rather than looking more deeply at why Lee presented both options, those who felt threatened not only wanted a decision but wanted it to be "the right one." Rather than looking at the necessity for many options and rather than looking at the violence of racism "Do The Right Thing," through the eyes of these critics, became a film that caused white communities, to stand at the ready rather than question themselves.

Both of these films portray portions of reality and it is in this that the connection lies. Both are called radical (the "R" word), both are called unnecessarily violent, and both are called hindrances to the womiin's movement and the civil rights movement (as if these do not need to be connected).

The power structures are afraid of the anger seen in both of these films and by not looking at why the anger is present (to give life, not death), films such as these are condemned. As Beverly Harrison states,

Anger is not the opposite of love. It is better understood as a feeling signal that all is not well in our relation to other persons or groups or to the world around us . . . anger is - and it always is - a sign of some resistance in ourselves to the moral quality of the social relations in which we are immersed. . . .

. . . The group or person who confronts us in anger is demanding acknowledgment from us, asking for the recognition of their presence, their value . . . We can ignore, avoid, condemn, or blame. Or we can act to alter the relationship toward reciprocity, beginning a₂ real process of hearing and speaking to each other.

The complexities of and messages in film obligate us to look more deeply at them and to speak out about the oppression found and/or the realities revealed. Films such as "Thelma and Louise" and "Do The Right Thing" that are hastily condemned by critics defending injustices should heed the words above and look more carefully at where anger and their own defensiveness originates.

Many elements within the content of these films are similar, though varied, as they are found in underlying parallel themes and developments. When looked for carefully these elements can also be found in other films that challenge.³ In each film previously discussed, the themes present consist of senses of entrapment and the use of violence while the underlying developments involve how each film deals primarily with a particular issue, treating the primary issue of the other film as secondary.

The sense of being trapped is certainly not a new concept when exposing

oppressive structures and as both films are about people within working class contexts, these traps expose the oppression of a classist society. Explicit dialogue within each film may not put this theme at the forefront, but it is nevertheless present and expressed through action, context and camera use. Upon first glance a sense of being trapped may not be found in "Thelma and Louise" as locations are comprised of wide open spaces and back, less traveled roads. These hardly conjure up images of a trap, but as the story unfolds, revelations about these women's past, present and future develop and culminate in an ultimate attempt of entrapment. Both are trapped in different, but unfulfilling relationships; both are trapped as victims of violence (explicit with Thelma, implied with Louise); and both are progressively trapped as the FBI moves in. As escape is attempted, reminders of these traps are present through dialogue, action and the attitudes of the other characters. The fruition of the escape/trap comes within the last ten minutes of the film as Thelma and Louise are chased to the edge of a cliff. Two options are open to them at this point. They could turn themselves in and face a judicial system that would not recognize their context or they could make a final escape off the cliff and into the air. They opt for escape and while this can be viewed as choosing one trap over another, Thelma and Louise, given their context, chose freedom through death rather than traps in life.

The sense of being trapped in "Do The Right Thing" comes primarily out of the setting for the film as the characters introduced never leave the neighborhood. All of the intricacies of character, relationship, plot and message take place on one block, on one street, in one city on one summer

Saturday and early Sunday. As these days unfold, different racial/ethnic groups are revealed to the audience as they co-exist in this diverse neighborhood. They are in an essentially cramped space. It is not that these people want or have to leave, the point is they cannot and they don't. Lee does several things in his writing and directing of the film that makes this evident. As a Pizza delivery person, Mookie presumably has to go farther than this block to deliver, but the audience never actually goes with him; Sal, Pino and Vito do not live in this particular neighborhood, but theirs is never seen; and even though it is a Saturday when other activities, besides work, are taking place outside of this neighborhood the characters never leave. Furthermore, although another previously mentioned interpretation of the "heat" has been described, it is as though this "heat" has encapsulated the neighborhood and is only penetrable by the white man driving the convertible and the two white cops. The only indication that there is anything outside of this neighborhood comes at the very end of the film, and although this may seem to be a method of showing escape, the camera extending up over the neighborhood showing the next block and the New York skyline reveals that the neighborhood, the city and the world are all trapped in a system of oppression explicitly set up as such.

The development of a primary issue while treating other related issues as secondary creates a complementarity between these two films in which they are both capable of highlighting the carelessness of the other. Each film is intentional in the definition, setting out and exposing of intricacies included in particular "isms," but do not connect and in fact perpetuate other forms of oppression. The fact that "Do The Right Thing" deals primarily

with racism and "Thelma and Louise" deals primarily with sexism allows each to critique the other at least to a degree. For instance, the sexism present in "Do The Right Thing" can only be critiqued by "Thelma and Louise" to a certain point because the latter does not take into consideration the particularities of sexism for women of color. Conversely, the racism in "Thelma and Louise" can only be critiqued to a degree because "Do The Right Thing" is showing particular aspects of racism while "Thelma and Louise" nearly denies the existence of people of color.

There are, of course, many constraints on film such as time, the difficulty in tackling more than one issue and the attitudes of both the creators of the film and the executives that give it the go ahead. These constraints however, whether practical or ideological only perpetuate disconnections between "isms" and leave oppressed communities either fighting within or among each other.

Each screenwriter chose to deal with a particular "ism" within a particular context, and while this is legitimate as films can get too intricate, this does not excuse each film from blatantly perpetuating other "isms." The most obvious example, which has been previously explored, is in "Thelma and Louise" where the Rastafarian is used as comic relief as he blows marijuana smoke into the trunk of a police car where the officer is trapped. Another example, this in terms of sexism, is present in "Do The Right Thing" as we see Mookie's treatment of his girlfriend Tina. Mookie basically avoids Tina unless and until he wants sex, creating in her, an object not a person. Even when Tina says no, Lee has, through his script, created a context wherein coaxing gets him what he wants.

With these two examples and those outlined in previous chapters in mind, the ways in which these films are capable of critiquing the other is evident. "Do The Right Thing," through exposing some of the intricacies of racism in America, has the ability to create in the minds of the viewers, ways to critique "Thelma and Louise" for its careless treatment of race while "Thelma and Louise," through its setting out some of the issues surrounding sexism, is capable of pointing out the violence of sexism within "Do The Right Thing."

From "Do The Right Thing" not taking the time to expose the double oppression of women of color to "Thelma and Louise" employing the old standby of comic relief by using a black man, these films, although radically important, did not look at or acknowledge the connections between race and sex oppression. The contexts of these films and the lives of the characters are very different, but this cannot lull viewers into dismissing the perpetuation of one "ism" while exploring and exposing another.

The use of violence in both "Thelma and Louise" and "Do The Right Thing" has been deemed unnecessary as analysis of the context in which these people live has been avoided. To be sure, some critics have carefully analyzed these films, but are regarded unworthy of popular note. No matter what the reasons behind such avoidance or non-listening exist, the violence in these films is present and to say that it is simply perpetrated without cause is to allow it to go unnamed.

The specific incidents of violence by those in power within these two films come in various forms, but the response to that violence is not simply retaliation, rather it is self-defense. If killing and blowing up a truck, can be called violence how is it that raping, objectification and police

brutality can not. Racism and Sexism are violence and when not named as such, what is the American movie-going public supposed to believe? One option for action, favored by the definers of good, is that of nonviolent civil disobedience, but as non-violence is not an option open to everyone at all times, these films show what can happen when the violence of living becomes too much to bear. In "Thelma and Louise" both womiin have been victims of violence in various forms for much of their lives and self-defense became an option as soon as the last straw was drawn. "Do The Right Thing" shows the tensions that build as the white power structures keep people of different racial/ethnic groups fighting with one another.

The shooting of Harlan after his raping Thelma was self-defense because physical abuse is violence against; the locking of the police officer in the trunk of his car was self-defense as Thelma and Louise would have otherwise been caught and thrown into a violent justice system; the blowing up of the oil truck was self-defense as objectification and sexist language is violence; and the driving off the cliff was self-defense as the judicial system would not have taken the contexts for this type of violence under advisement. Violence is a much broader concept that the establishment would have us believe. Sexism is violence as it is a device that keeps womiin in fear, in line, and above all "nice girls." It is designed to stop womiin from defending themselves and as Thelma and Louise reject this prescribed role those who perpetuate sexism are also those who condemn it. Audiences were given clear pictures of the violence womiin contend with each day and were given glimpses of what it means to be a womyn in what Americans believe is "The Land of the Free."

Lee's "Do The Right Thing" presents a much different context for the use of self-defense. The intricacies of this picture are so well developed that many of the images and scenes involve issues of self-defense on different levels at different times. Often two instances of self-defense are seen simultaneously as in the "music battle" between Radio Raheem and an unnamed Hispanic man. This shows mutual self-defense as two members of different racial/ethnic communities fight for the recognition of their particular culture in a society that does not care for either of them. The Hispanic man does concede, but not without Lee making a particular point as both sides of this self-defense war hear "Fight The Power" continue to play.

The "riot" scene near the end of the film also displays simultaneous self-defense as both sides of this riot are again protecting and defending their culture. The scene is the burning of Sal's Pizzeria which begins as Radio Raheem and Sal fight over the sanctity of space and expression. The culmination of the riot comes after the killing of Radio Raheem by a police officer in which Mookie finally takes a stand and in which Lee makes the overall point that simultaneous self-defense is not the answer in a society of systematic violence. The different communities involved here have been kept "busy" by the system that encourages the in-fighting. The system is therefore, successful in keeping oppressed communities from questioning and fighting the power as they defend themselves against one another.

The use of violence and self-defense in these two films is reflective of the societal cycle of violence experienced by communities of resistance who, in the fighting back, are accused of being the perpetrators and perpetuators. Both films, in detailing necessities of self-defense in a

violent system of oppression expose this cycle and in doing so are condemned by the upholders of that cycle. Thelma and Louise both underwent a war with the system and themselves as did those in "Do The Right Thing" while struggling with each other. Through experiencing violence the battle worn learn violence and use violence only to be condemned for using that which was learned. This cycle, its intricacies and its outcomes does not happen by mistake. It allows the system to keep oppressed people down through justifying the use of violence to squelch violence (really self-defense).

Look at "Desert Storm" where the U.S. government enabled itself to batter that which it had created; look at Panama where the U.S. government trained, paid, and put in power a leader only to crush him when it became convenient to do so; and look at Nicaragua where a U.S. supported regime's oppression was overthrown only to be fought against for their supposed violent and terrorist tactics. The system uses that which has created in order to blame those who have used the learnings in self-defense so that it can perpetuate and "justify" creating more violence. The confusion created by this type of cycle is, of course, what keeps it alive and as "Thelma and Louise" and "Do The Right Thing" both reflect and expose this cycle so too are they condemned for it. They have named both systemic traps and violence, have fought against them in particular ways and it is in this that the danger for the powerful lies and in this that the powerful justify the condemnation.

NOTES

¹ While I do not have statistical data on the effects of critics opinions on viewers, it is my contention that the ability of the powers that be to either keep oppressed groups fighting with themselves and/or other groups serves those in power to keep communities of resistance busy so that those communities are not able to move forward as fast as they might otherwise.

² Beverly Harrison, Making the Connections: Essays in Feminist Social Ethics (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 14-15.

³ The more explicit, yet underlying themes in "Thelma and Louise" and "Do The Right Thing" may not be found as easily in other films that challenge, but the elements do exist. For films that contain such elements see: Housekeeping. Dir. Bill Forsyth, with Christine Lahti, Columbia Pictures Industries, Inc, 1987.; Desert Hearts. Dir. Donna Deitch, with Helen Shaver, Patricia Charonneau, and Audra Lindley, Samuel Goldwyn Co., 1986.; Dead Poets Society. Dir. Peter Weir, with Robin Williams, Touchstone/Silver Screen Partners IV, 1989.; Stand and Deliver. Dir. Ramon Menendez, with Eduard James Olmos, and Lou Diamond Phillips, Warner Bros., 1988.; Silkwood. Dir. Mike Nichols, with Meryl Streep, Kurt Russel, and Cher, ABC Motion Pictures/Twentieth Century Fox, 1984.; Sophie's Choice. Dir. Allen J. Pakula, with Meryl Streep, Kevin Kline, and Peter MacNicol, ITC Entertainment/CBS-Fox Video, 1982.; and A Question of Silence. Dir. Marleen Gorris, with Cox Habbema, Nelly Frijda, Henrittee Tol, and Edda Barnes, QFI/Sigma Films Ltd, 1983.

CONCLUSION

Challenges to Filmmakers and Educators

As Marx and Engels long ago observed, art is a form of social consciousness - a special form of social consciousness that can potentially awaken an urge in those affected by it to creatively transform their oppressive environments.

Film and its legacy have long been used for purposes such as reality reflecting, future suggesting and past highlighting, but in all of those categories the overriding message has been one of entertainment. If they reflect a reality that is accepted by the establishment, show a future that is perfecting or portray a past that is glorified they are rewarded. As film however, can be connected to revolutionary change and can be that which has transformative power, challenging the filmmakers and educators is that which will create new avenues for societal liberation. Inroads have been made by a few directors who have seen the necessity in their own lives and in the life of society to create film that will begin uncovering the oppressive structures of the society in which we live. Many films challenge, but the bolder the film, the greater the ability for change. Directors such as Spike Lee, John Singleton, Euzhan Palcy, Penney Marshall, Barbra Streisand and Ridley Scott are among those attempting to show the realities and intricacies of people's lives as screen visuals and are therefore, creating pathways for other directors to effect change. No film is perfect and even those that are blatantly perpetuating often have elements of them that challenge.

Those that do challenge in an outright manner however, are not only being true to what they see in society, but are also making audiences think more seriously about the lives that they lead. Some will reject any film that causes a defense mechanism to activate, but others will question those defenses and will become more adept at analysis and critique. As audiences, filmmakers and educators with a liberationist consciousness begin to question each other and themselves, the process for empowerment and change will become more tangible. Spike Lee as one of the prime questioners in the film industry has created places for radical filmmakers where there were none; Callie Khouri as one of the newest radical writers is creating places for unconventional screenplays; and Ridley Scott who, in his willingness to take on a project such as "Thelma and Louise," is setting an example for others who have been frightened to act. It is just a beginning, but in the challenging comes the change and in the questioning come the answers.

As the intricacies of both "Thelma and Louise" and "Do The Right Thing" have been explored, the danger involved for the power structures is great. Those who oppose films such as these as overall concepts have a stake in seeing at least parts of those structures remain and therefore condemn them to stop the flow of creative ideas and social change. To know this and to challenge this is a responsibility taken on by all those working for liberation and in this vein so too must the film world, the educational system, and the church be held accountable for what is taught through image, histories and symbols. To suggest ways to challenge and new ways to do is to create possibilities for the direction in which all parts of society can and ultimately must go.

Filmmakers, who reflect the images we know and create the structure through which images are seen, need not only to be challenged by audiences, but must challenge each other and the industry for which they work. As mentioned above, directors such as Spike Lee have not taken "no" for an answer and have created work that is radical in both the making and the final project. To challenge those that challenge is necessary, but as they are the ones that are more accessible to critique, it is important to remember that the writers and directors that do not challenge need to also be held accountable for the work they do. Those who begin the fight cannot carry all of that fight without backs breaking and as all liberationists know, in the back breaking comes the halt of something positive.

Filmmakers that do challenge the structures under which we live, must of course, be pushed on what they include and what they leave out of the films they create. This is seen in both "Thelma and Louise" and "Do The Right Thing" as the "secondary" issues in each film were perpetuated rather than challenged. Ways in which these films could further the arguments made or tackle an issue that was left by the wayside come out of future work that could be initiated. One particular way in which this could be accomplished is through the use of sequels. Sequels have traditionally been utilized by makers of either action/adventure or horror films, but as political films deal with unresolved issues, they too could make great impacts on the filmworld and on audiences by showing, through film, that the fight is unfinished and that there are connected issues that need to be explored.

A sequel to "Thelma and Louise," where the men, who upheld the sexist structures from language to rape, dealt with their attitudes and actions

would be an effective tool for consciencetization. In a sequel such as this these men could analyze their actions from a new consciousness that employed liberationist thinking and analysis in order to further the message of the original film. This could also effect those opposed to the original in such a way that they would take notice of what messages "Thelma and Louise" was sending as well as what socialization does take place within this society. A sequel to "Do The Right Thing" could take an audience back into the neighborhood seen in the original to explore the sexism of the male characters and the community. Lee did the most impressive analysis of how racism operates within this society and has the capability of writing and directing a film that would take seriously how sexism operates in the United States. Sequels such as these for any number of political films would show the seriousness of the connections between all "isms." They could create more sequels to tackle more issues without losing their effectiveness in the many battles for revolutionary change. As Angela Davis in Women, Culture and Poltics states,

If cultural workers utilize their talents on an ever-increasing scale to accomplish the task of awakening and sensitizing people to the need for a mass challenge to the ultraright, the prospects for strengthening and further uniting the antimonopoly movement, bringing together labor, Afro- Americans, women, and peace activists will greatly increase. As that movement wins victories, existing artists will draw inspiration from the creative energy of this process, and new artists will emerge as a result. If we are able to set this dynamic in motion, we will begin to move securely in the direction of economic, racial, and sexual emancipation . . .²

Educators as well, must be challenged to become conscious of the need for alternative forms of education in which the learning that takes place is emmanicipatory rather than oppressive. The traditional ways of learning

and the expectations of what should be learned have proved damaging to those who are educated and only remain helpful to the system that oppresses and encourages socialization that damages. Schools that value each of its members for where they are, where they come from and who they hope to be rather than trying to assimilate all into a certain few categories could provide beneficial models to the contribution of a future. Alternative education that encourages creativity, openness and equality provides a liberationist environment where the histories of all are taken into account, where students would learn better and more willingly and where the downward spiral of society would slowly begin to heal. Suggestions and challenges to the educational system come in the form of holistic and inclusive teaching methods in which liberationist critique and analysis is employed in all subjects at all levels. This includes history, religion, sociology, english, etc. where attitudes are taught and learned, where abusive power dynamics are bred through the most elementary of actions and where children learn fast and furious that where they come from can determine where they will go. The "American Dream" as it is not a reality should not be pushed on the burgeoning minds of the next generation. Instead, liberationist models of co-creative education that open minds to new understandings should be employed wherein socialization is questioned and critiqued. A central area in which this socialization takes place is the media as children of today watch Television at the highest rate in history and where imagination is squelched and replaced by set images and expectations. The working with books in the classroom can only be one part of education as this society moves towards the year 2000. It is absolutely necessary to expose children to what is being watched

through every medium that employs visuals from video games to magazines to television to film. What needs to be fought against through the exposing of these image centers is that which is outlined by Geneva

Smitherman-Donaldson when she states,

The dominant white group has many ways to exert, consolidate and legitimate that power and thus maintain control. . . . For the dominant group's power to work effectively, it must be legitimated. It requires decision making and legislation by society's political discussion and consensus among the dominant groups in society. And it requires mediation in socialization networks, such as schools, and information-disseminating institutions such as the mass media.³

As this is a truth statement, the educational system has a responsibility to provide new ways of thinking about what is seen and believed and to provide the resources for alternative ways of teaching. With this type of work, the education that is given and received in this country will reach heights of unheard of popularity creating a much more productive, liberated and knowledgeable future group of people who will be equipped to live their lives working for change.

As for the Church which relies on symbols and images to bring its corporate body together, a realization that these symbols as they are often portrayed only reinforce the oppressive hierarchical structure of oppression, must take place not only for the life of the church, but for the life of those who support that church. The symbols in themselves are not always damaging, however the interpretation of them to the advantage of those in power is. To say that the church does not have as much responsibility in the political structure of this country is to do a disservice to its power and its possibility. The church has a responsibility to seriously listen to and hear what its members, who are working for liberative change, say

and do. It has a responsibility to empower both children and adults to question the images received in order to renew the capability of members of this society in a more productive manner. It has a responsibility to decompartmentalize images and symbols in order that people can see their own power to effect change rather than solely relying on that which the church defines as proper images for the divine. As seen in the films discussed within this work, images of the divine and definitions of grace come in a myriad of forms in which a new sense of where power is and where creative empowerment lies can take place. When the church begins to take seriously the role it can play in societal change, through listening to its members and its critics, it will be revived in a new and more effective way.

Finally, to us, as viewers of film and of society, the work for liberative change, as we know, comes from us. As we discover what is being seen and uncover what images and signs are portrayed, the possibilities for challenge and re-interpretation of socialization can empower us to push those that create and reinforce images to become more radical. We need to be more intentional about what we are watching in order to discover what is impressed upon us and what effects result. To look for clues as to what is being learned enables us to take control of how we think about what we see and creates possibilities for dialogue and change.

With this work as a beginning, I hope that the ways in which intricate details are seen and registered begin to change as more knowledge opens eyes and changes practice. Perfection in film is not expected, but as films become more intentional and as viewers become more aware, the theo-ethical sensibilities of us as socialized beings can change and become more effective

in the work for liberation. As Angela Davis states, "Progressive art can assist people to learn not only about the objective forces at work in the society in which they live, but also about the intensely social character of their interior lives. Ultimately, it can propel people toward social emancipation."⁴ And as Albert Camus so succinctly concludes, "Beauty, no doubt, does not make revolutions. But a day will come when revolution will have need of beauty."⁵

NOTES

¹ Angela Davis, Women, Culture, and Politics (New York: Vintage Books 1990), 199.

² Ibid.

³ Geneva Smitherman-Donaldson, Discourse and Discrimination (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988), 17.

⁴ Angela Davis, Women, Culture, and Politics, 200.

⁵ Albert Camus, The Rebel quoted in Alice Walker, Revolutionary Petunias and Other Poems (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich 1973), 28.

GLOSSARIES

Explanation

These glossaries are intended to give the reader a basic overview of film and theo-ethical terms as they are utilized within these particular language circles.

I have not used all of these terms in this project, but have included them because I believe it is necessary to know the language used in these contexts.

GLOSSARY OF FILM TERMS¹

Asynchronous sound: Sound derived from a source not in the image on the screen at the time it is heard - that is, sound not in synchronization with corresponding lip movement or object in the film.

Auteur theory: A theory that says there is a person primarily responsible for the entire style and treatment of the content of the film. Generally used in reference to a director with a recognizable style and thematic preoccupation, the theory covers other production personnel (writers, performers, cinematographers, editors) who are seen as the major force behind a given film. More particularly, film auteurs function within the boundaries of studio production systems and are distinguishable from film artists, who have nearly total control over all aspects of production.

Background music: Nonindigenous music that accompanies a film, usually on the sound track, but maybe from a live performance of one or more instrumentalists, or from records or tapes. Most background music in nontheatrical films is not scored to fit the action; in theatrical films the music is usually written to reinforce and emphasize the action.

Backlighting: Light coming from behind objects or performers being photographed.

Camera angle, angle: The physical relationship between camera and subject. If the camera is low, tilted up toward the subject, the result is a low angle shot. If the camera is high, tilted down toward the subject, the result is a high-angle shot. If the camera is tilted neither up nor down, the result is a normal-angle shot. If the camera is not tilted but is placed at the eye level of a person standing or seated, the angle is called an eye-level shot. If the camera is tilted off its horizontal and vertical axes, the result is a tilt angle or dutch-tilt angle.

Camera movement: Any motion of a camera during a shot, such as panning, tilting, dollying, or craning.

Close-up shot: A shot in which the image of the subject or its most important part fills most of the frame. A close-up shot of a person usually includes the head and part of the shoulders.

Code: The rules or forms that allow a message to be understood, to signify. Codes are the rules operating on the means of expression and thus are distinct from the means of expression.

Compilation film: A film made by editing together large amounts of footage shot for other purposes - that is, old movie clips, home movies, newsreels, and so forth.

Composition: The arrangement, balance, and general relationship of masses and degrees of light and shade, line, and color within a picture.

Contextual criticism: A form of criticism that sees film in relation to the context in which it is created and in which it is shown. Considerations of specific films and groups of films touch on history, politics, sociology, psychology, and other disciplines.

Contrapunctual sound, counterpoint: Sound, especially music, that contrasts or conflicts with the action in a motion picture.

Credits, credit titles: The listing of script writers, costume designers, art directors, cinematographers, actors, electricians, carpenters, assistants to the assistants, and so forth.

Deep-focus cinematography: Filming technique that renders objects in focus at both near and far distances.

Director: The individual who interprets the script in terms of performances and cinematic technique, and who supervises all phases of the work involved in achieving a coherent, unified film presentation.

Dissolve, lap dissolve: An optical edit that results when one shot fades out at the same time that a second shot fades in.

Establishing shot: Usually, a long shot that shows a location of the ensuing action, but may be a close-up or even a medium shot that has some sign or other clue that identifies the location. It is sometimes called a cover shot.

Expressionism: Fantasy and distortion in sets, editing, lighting, and costumes used as a means of conveying the inner feelings of both filmmaker and characters.

Fade: An optical or sound effect in which the screen or sound track gradually changes from black to an image or silence to sound (fade-in) or the reverse (fade-out).

Film criticism: The analysis and evaluation of films, usually in relation to theoretical principles including aesthetics, philosophy, history, economics, and so on.

Film review, review: A summary of the content of a film, usually accompanied by information about the cast and the production, and often by the reviewer's judgment as to the worth of the film, published in print media or delivered orally on radio or television.

Film theory: General principles that explain the nature and capabilities of film. It refers to the ongoing discourse that attempts to uncover such principles.

Flash pan, swish pan: An extremely rapid pan in which the subject becomes blurred.

Focus: (1) The sharpness or definition of the image. (2) To adjust the sharpness and clarity of the image by adjusting the lens or light source so as to create sharp or soft focus or to change focus.

Foreground music: Music, often synchronous, that finds its source within the actual narrative of the film. It can be heard realistically over the radio or from a television set, or performed on screen by the narrative characters (both major and minor) or by performers in the background.

Formalism: A cinematic or critical approach to film that stresses form over content in the belief that meaning occurs in the way that content is presented.

Frame, framing: (1) One individual picture, as defined by the limits of the camera aperture, on a piece of motion picture film. (2) To compose a shot.

Genre: A film type, such as a western or science-fiction film, that usually has a conventional plot structure and characters; loosely, a formula film.

Icon, iconography: An object, landscape, or performer that accrues symbolic as well as particular meaning and conveys that meaning through recurrent presence in a group or genre of films. The term is not to be confused with a motif, which accrues such meaning in a single film only.

Intellectual montage: An assembly of shots through editing that results in conveying an abstract or intellectual concept. A group of people being menaced and beaten by mounted police next to a shot of cattle being butchered in a slaughterhouse provokes the idea that the people in the first shot are being victimized and are helpless, considered no better than the dumb animals by their oppressors. The idea itself is not pictured; it is suggested by the relationship of the two shots.

Long shot: A shot that shows all or most of a fairly large subject and usually much of the surroundings.

Long take: A single shot that lasts for a relatively lengthy period of time before it is juxtaposed with another shot. It reveals information within an unbroken context of space and time, and through camera and subject movement rather than through editing.

Mise-en-scene: A term generally used to describe those elements of the film image placed before the camera and in relation to it, rather than to the process of editing that occurs after the interaction between camera and subject.

Montage: The assembly of shots - hence, editing - and especially the portrayal and creation of ideas through the use of many short shots. A series of shots, often with superimpositions and optical effects, showing a condensed series of events - for example, a crime wave in a city.

Motif: An object or sound that becomes linked to a film's narrative in a meaningful way so that it becomes symbolically identified with a character or action. The glass paperweight in "Citizen Kane" and the attack music in "Jaws" are motifs. The term should not be confused with an icon, which functions from film to film, whereas motifs convey specific meaning in a single film only.

Overhead shot: A shot made from a position directly above the action.

Pan, pan shot: A movement of the camera from left to right or right to left along a horizontal plane. Unlike the tracking shot, in which the camera moves with the subject, the pan is shot from a stationary point.

Point of view shot: A shot made from a camera position close to the line of sight of a performer who is to be watching the action in the shot.

Producer: The entrepreneur who initiates and/or manages film production activities; also the administrator who is assigned to manage the production of a contract film.

Realism, realistic film: The use of scripts, staging, costuming, and camera coverage that renders the action as if it were real, not fantasy.

Attending to the conventions of realism - that is, the promotion of ordinary human figures in lifelike situation concerned with everyday problems - maintaining a high degree of plausibility.

Scene: A dramatic unit composed of a single shot or several shots. A scene usually takes place in a continuous time period, in the same setting, and involves the same characters.

Screen time: The time covered by the film's story, or narrative time-for instance, a lifetime, a week, two days.

Screenwriter, script writer: One who prepares stories, treatments, and scripts for motion pictures.

Script: A set of written specifications for the production of a motion picture. There are several different kinds of scripts, and they contain specifications for settings, action, camera coverage, dialogue, narration, music, and sound effects, in varying degrees of explicitness.

Semiotics: The study of signification via codes or systems in texts; the general science of signs, of systems of signification.

Sequence: A dramatic unit composed of several scenes, linked together by their emotional and narrative momentum. A sequence can span time and space so long as its dramatic elements and structure are unified.

Setting: The location for a film or parts of a film.

Shot: A single run of the camera; also, the piece of film resulting from such a run. Systematically joined together in the process of editing, shots are synthesized into sequences, and the sequences in turn are joined to form the film as a whole.

Sound bridge: A segment of sound track (dialogue, music, effects) that continues from one shot to into another, quite different shot - that is, time, space, or characters change radically enough for the two shots to be part of two separate scenes. The sound track thus acts as a unifier, or bridge, between the two, and the transition is less abrupt.

Sound effects: Any sounds from any source other than synchronized dialogue, narration or music.

Sound track: The portion of the length of film reserved for the sound record, or any recording so located; also, any length of film bearing sound only.

Special effects: Shots unobtainable by straightforward motion picture shooting techniques. In this category fall shots requiring contour matting, multiple image montages, split screens, vignetting, models, and the like. The term also applies to explosions, ballistics effects, and mechanical effects.

Star system: The system of developing audience appeal through publicity stressing a leading performer rather than other elements of a film.

Structuralism: The study of how human institutions and art forms are structured on basic notions of conflict and opposition (for example, light and dark, good and evil) and how these structures are repetitive and archetypal.

Subjective camera, subjective viewpoint: A situation in which the audience involvement with a scene is intensified through identification with the camera point of view. In some dramatic films, the camera has taken place of an actor, with other actors looking directly at the lens.

Synchronous sound: Sound whose source is apparent in the picture, and that matches the action.

Take: A shot; also, a term used to indicate the number of times a given shot has been made. Takes are usually numbered sequentially and identified in picture by slate and in track by voice.

Theme: The story subject matter from which the general value or idea forming the intellectual background for a film is evolved.

Tone: The mood or atmosphere of a film (for example, ironic, comic, nostalgic, romantic) created as the sum of the film's cinematic techniques.

Tracking shot: A shot made while the camera and its entire support are moving.

Viewpoint: The apparent distance and angle from which the camera views and records the subject. The term is not to be confused with point-of-view shots or subjective matter shots.

Voice over: A sound and picture relationship in which the narrator's voice accompanies picture action; also, any off-screen voice.

Wide-angle lens, wide-angle shot: A short lens able to capture a broad field of action. It appears to create depth and, in its extreme forms (such as the fisheye), distorts linear perspective so that the edges of the image may appear bowed.

NOTES

¹Adapted from Tim Bywater and Thomas Sobchack Introduction to Film Criticism: Major Critical Approaches to Narrative Film (New York: Longman, Inc., 1989), 222 - 234.

Glossary of Theological and Ethical Terms

Black Liberation Theology: Liberation theology emerging from and in the context of the black community in North America living under the oppression of racism. "Black theology is a theology of liberation because it is a theology which arises from an identification with the oppressed blacks of America, seeking to interpret the gospel of Jesus in the light of the black condition. It believes that the liberation of the black community is God's liberation."¹

Classism: Prejudice and discrimination, either overt or covert, on the basis of class (not only economic tax bracket) from a position of power (middle to upper class) within the larger society.²

Deontological or Formalist Ethics: According to this, the action itself determines whether or not that action is right or wrong. These theories consider standards such as Divine Law, Natural Rights, or justice. Often engage in a balancing of rights. Catholic Moral Theology engages this and is under the category of Normative Ethics.³

Descriptive or Scientific Ethics: Used by some sociologists and anthropologists - this approach tries to investigate and clarify the values which govern particular societies without judging them as good or bad.⁴

Ethical Relativism: Belief that no moral standard can be shown or proven to be more valid than any other moral standard. There are many kinds of relativists, but all deny the existence of any universal or absolute moral principles.⁵

Ethics: "(1) Theological interpretation in a restricted sense—that is, the understanding and interpretation of God, God's relation to the world and particularly to human beings, and God's purposes; (2) the interpretation of the meaning and significance of human experience and history, of events and circumstances in which human beings act, and of nature; (3) the interpretation of persons or communities as moral agents, and of their acts; and (4) the interpretation of how persons and communities ought to make moral choices and judge their actions, those of others, and the states of affairs in the world."⁶

Ethnocentrism: Prejudice and discrimination (overt or covert) on the basis of one's country of origin from a position of power within the larger context of the world (See note ²).

Feminist Liberation Theology: "Feminist Liberation Theology is a theological movement that has developed during the last two decades among women in Euroamerican cultures who understand feminism to be a shared commitment to the well-being of women of all classes, cultures, racial/ethnic heritages, ages, and sexual preferences; and to justice for poor men, men of color, gay men, and other men who suffer oppression."⁷

Gay and Lesbian Liberation Theology: Theology emerging from the particular context of heterosexist oppression.

Grace: Traditionally seen as a gift from God to a humyn or humynity. In the context of this project it is a gift between peoples meaning that God is within all. The divinity and grace of God can be passed between us in moments of deep understanding and realization.

Heterosexism: Prejudice and discrimination (overt or covert) on the basis sexual orientation from a position of power (heterosexual) within the larger society (See note ²).

Liberation Ethics: "Disentangle, debunk, unmask the ideologies, theologies, and systems of values operative in a particular society by analyzing the established power relationships that determine the cultural, political, and economic presuppositions and by evaluating legitimating myths which sanction the enforcement of such values in order to become responsible decision-makers (doers of justice) who envision a structural and systemic alternative that embraces the well-being of us all."⁸

Liberation Theology: Theology that has emerged from struggles of oppression. First conceived through base Christian communities in Latin America, liberation theology has since spread and has spurred different oppressed groups onto new thinking and living. Liberation theology seeks to critique the tradition and dominant ideology while providing alternatives for thinking, living, and being in relation with others.⁹

Metaethics: A highly technical discipline within philosophy which investigates the meaning of ethical terms and the degree to which ethical norms can be shown to be true or false, valid or invalid.¹⁰

Mixed Ethical Theories: This considers the actions and consequences and falls under the category of Normative Ethics.¹¹

Nonnormative Ethics: Attempts to describe (not judge) how people actually make moral judgments. Different approaches include Scientific Ethics, Metaethics and Ethical Relativism.¹²

Normative Ethics: Attempts to tell us how to live our lives, i.e.: to explain and justify specific principles or standards of humyn conduct.¹³

Racism: Prejudice and discrimination (overt or covert) on the basis of race/ethnicity from a position of power (white) within the larger society (See note ²).

Sexism: Prejudice and discrimination (overt or covert) on the basis of sex from a position of power (male) within the larger society (See note ²).

Sin: Traditionally seen purely personal transgressions with no connection to structural violence, sin, in the context of this project includes the maintaining of structures which are sinful through the personal sin of not working against the oppression caused by the structures.

Teleological or Consequentialist Ethics: According to this, actions are good or are judged as morally correct if they have good consequences. Only consequences are taken into consideration are taken into account when judging whether or not behavior is moral or immoral. This falls under the category of Normative Ethics.¹⁴

Theology: The study of God and God's relation to the world.

Traditional Theology: (1) Theology defining the tradition under which Christians live. (2) Universalized tenets of Christianity, written by men, through men's experiences, but considered universal and true for all.

Womanism: "From womanish. (Opp. of 'girlish,' i.e., frivolous, irresponsible, not serious.) A black feminist or feminist of color . . . Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered 'good' for one . . . Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender."¹⁵ This term originates in the work of Alice Walker (partial definition above). It is not simply 'black feminism,' but rather signifies black women's reality. Womanist theologians such as Delores Williams and Katie Cannon, though as scholars and educators they frequently identify their work as feminist liberation theology, invite attention to their profoundly womanist perspectives. Other women of color, Asian and Latina as well as African American, often share with womanists a focus on the particularity of their racial/ethnic roots and values in the context of imperialistic anglo assumptions that manage to seep through even in the best feminist liberation theology done by anglo (or other white) women."¹⁶

NOTES

¹ James Cone, A Black Theology of Liberation, 2nd edition. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986), 4-5.

² When speaking about "isms" I mean the structural socio-political oppression and violence (not necessarily physical) that is exercised over and against those in a society who do not fit into the accepted mainstream norm of white, heterosexual, upper-middle - upper class, North American men. In defining this as such it should be known that as those who fit this category have the societal power to decide what is good and right for others they are also the ones who have the power to keep these traditions in place and mainstreamed.

³ Adapted from Dr. Joan Novak's course Religion 224 "Christian Ethics." Denison University: Granville, OH., 1990.

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ James F. Childress and John Macquarrie, eds., The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Ethics (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press), 1986. 87.

⁷ Carter Heyward, Touching Our Strength: The Erotic as Power and the Love of God (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1989), 187.

⁸ Adapted from Dr. Katie G. Cannon's course Ethics 176 "Resources for a Constructive Ethic: The Black Women's Literary Tradition." Episcopal Divinity School: Cambridge, MA., 1991.

⁹ Childress, The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Ethics. 349.

¹⁰ Dr. Novak's course "Religion 224: Christian Ethics."

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Alice Walker, In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers, 1983), xi-xii.

¹⁶ Heyward, Touching Our Strength: The Erotic as Power and the Love of God, 194-195.

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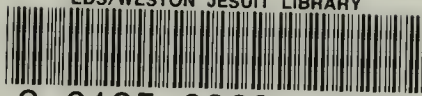
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